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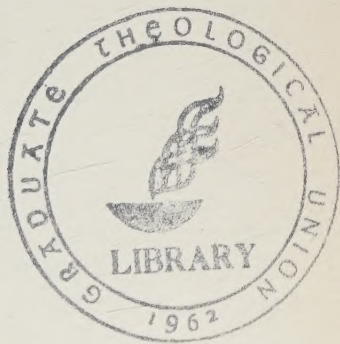


# IN TOUCH WITH CHRIST

BY

JAMES REID, M.A.

ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH, EASTBOURNE



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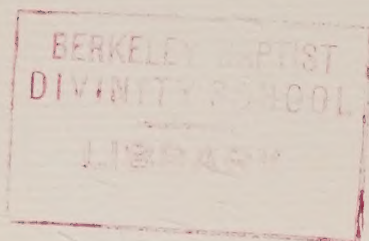
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## THE TOUCH OF CHRIST

MARK i.—“And Jesus . . . put forth His hand and touched him . . . and immediately the leprosy departed from him.”

**T**HE description of this incident is as graphic as a cinema picture. We can see the whole thing happening before our eyes, clean-cut and vital. There were two elements in the miracle. The first was the faith of the leper. The agony of his condition had so struck into this man's soul that he broke all the regulations and ran to the feet of Christ. It could not have been easy ; for, besides these regulations, the antipathy to a leper on the part of healthy people had created a barrier of mistrust and suspicion in their attitude which had to be overcome before the poor fellow could even come to Christ with his need. That barrier of mistrust is a paralysing thing ; it is just that which so often keeps people out of contact with the grace that can save. Perhaps it was his very despair of a cure in any other way that broke the chain and set faith free. It is one of the strange facts of great conversion experiences that at the moment when men realise they have no other hope but the mercy of God, they discover that the imprisoning walls of self are broken down

and that they are open to Christ. To realise our helplessness is the secret of release from self. That daring faith in Christ which had no doubts either of His power or His willingness or His approachableness was an element in the cure.

② The second element was the attitude of Jesus. Jesus put forth His hand and touched him, and immediately the leprosy was cleansed. It was like the contact with some vital physical force, and there is one interpreter who suggests that it was the touch of Christ's healthy vitality which wrought the cure. In reality, it was the contact of a soul with God. The point I want to make at the moment is the effect of that touch. It was a redeeming touch. What a vital personality Jesus was! His very touch was re-creative. Even His apparently casual contacts with people made them better, stronger, happier, more able to face life. That is worth thinking about. Does it not suggest to us that there may be more in our casual contacts with people than we realise? We are touching people every day of our lives. Sometimes it is a physical touch—a hand laid on their shoulder, or held for a moment in theirs, perhaps a flash of the eye as we pass them on the street, a casual conversation with unknown people in a shop or a railway carriage or a church. The question



is: What do we leave behind us? What is the quality of our contact with people? What is the essence of personality which we communicate? There is a touch that is defiling, a contact that degrades. It sends us away with a bad taste in the mouth. There are people for whom the joy of life has been clouded by such a touch. There is a touch of scorn and contempt, a touch which is depressing, which brings down the shadow of despair and makes us feel the chilly nothingness of life. There is the touch that awakens hatred and distrust of other people—just a word, maybe only a look, and we are made suspicious of some whom perhaps we trusted—a touch that makes us feel that we live in a tainted world, a wilderness of shifting sand. There is the touch, on the other hand, that warms the heart. It makes the world a friendlier place; it lights up the skylike a beam of sunshine and sets a song going in our hearts. One day there appeared in a Boston newspaper a short paragraph. "It was a dark and cloudy day in Newspaper Row, but Phillips Brooks came down the street, and all was bright." There is the touch that brings us into a spiritual world, that makes all the big hopes credible. Once, in a railway station, handing in a piece of baggage at a cloakroom, I met such a smile of kindly courtesy

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spiritual world*

*Jesus* in the eyes of the man behind the barrier that I came away with the indefinable sense that there I had met with Jesus Christ. It was such a look as brought out, in the world, even amid the traffic of a busy railway station, something of the face of God. It is often in our casual contacts more than in those which are studied that we betray the essence of what we are, and communicate it. But let us pass on to speak of the touch of Jesus and the miracle which it wrought in this leprous man.

What was it in that touch that wrought the miracle and let through the healing grace of God? It was not a physical thing. It was the touch of spirit with spirit, a real communion, a living interest which made him feel the sense of a personal bond. Without that personal bond, that touch of living human interest in the man, Jesus could not have cured him. None of us can help our fellows, either mentally or physically, without it. Let us try to analyse it.

## I

In the first place it was the touch of understanding. It made this leper feel that Jesus knew the whole heart of his trouble. He had entered into the agony of it. It is very difficult for us to put ourselves in the place of others

without some thought and imagination. One cannot be a good novelist without it, nor a real friend, much less a good Christian. Jesus saw what it meant for this man to be a leper, felt the daily and hourly horror of this sense of uncleanness defiling everything, clouding the joy of life. He felt the pain that it gave him to be exiled from home, never to come near his wife or children even to put his hand on them in blessing or love. He saw what it meant for him to be isolated from men or to have only the company of those who were like himself. Christ knew how the chill sense of solitude and desolation crept into the leper's soul, as every healthy man avoided his company, and made him stand back ringing his warning bell. A leper could never enter the temple, and from the treatment he received could never feel that God cared for him or that he had any share in His love.

Can *we* enter into the feelings of a man like that? Most people would not try to, for such understanding is dangerous. "To secure our own property and our own comfort," says Mr. Galsworthy, "to dole out our sympathy according to rule, just so that it won't really hurt us, that's what we're all after." When the door of understanding opens, one does not know where it will lead us. It is probable that this leper, like others, had become an enemy to

society—that his isolation had poisoned his blood with a resentment that broke out in curses against it. Can we wonder? But Jesus understood him, and was ready for the adventurous sympathy that costs.

It cannot be made too clear that it is not possible to help anyone in distress unless we understand, unless we can enter into their troubles, and see into their minds, whether the need be moral or physical. A censorious or a superior attitude is fatal. Unless we can feel the strength of a man's temptation and can realise the currents that have swept him off his feet, we can be of no use to him. There are young people whom we mishandle just for want of this. We do not realise their struggle, do not feel the force of the impulse which is seeking expression, and perhaps is creating the sullenness or bad temper, or what looks like it. Often a real understanding will give us the insight which would enable us to help them, and turn a headstrong, rebellious youth into a useful citizen. It would enable us to find the key by which fine capacities which are clamouring for expression might be healthily released. People all round us are longing for this touch of understanding. "The ache of life is not knowing where to take your weariness," says a writer in a self-revealing letter. "Let who will receive



your triumphs; to whom a man can take his heartache, that man walks near the Godhead!"

Want of understanding puts a chasm between us and others, across which nothing passes. Condemnation or callousness closes the door and locks it. However much we have to give, we cannot give it till the door is open. There are secrets which no one will tell save to the heart that knows and feels. Jesus had the saving touch that opens closed doors. He had the touch of understanding.

## II

*Touching the Broken-ness*

Again, His touch meant identification. It was as if He said, "I am one with you. I am in this trouble with you. I am with you in the struggle to be free." That kind of identification is the real essence of love. Unless we identify ourselves with others, we do not really love them. What does a mother's love mean, as she stands by the bedside of her sick child, but this—that she is one with him? *She* is lying there, suffering the agony that is tearing at his vitals. What does love mean for the father of that prodigal as he stands there waiting for his return—looking into the darkness and squalor of the far country? It means identification. He is there with the boy, there in that harlot's

den where the seven devils leap at his throat, there in the swine-field of remorse. He is one with him ; and the welcome home, when he returns, is just the expression of that oneness. Christ was bearing with the leper his burden of loneliness and social ostracism, literally standing in with him, standing in with him also in his craving for health.

Do we realise what it meant for Christ to touch him? Christ did not, of course, think of the risk to health, but that would have occurred to us. The peril of contagion would have been uppermost in our minds. Think too of the barrier of physical repugnance. Would any of us have enough love or compassion to cross that barrier? If you turn to the story of St. Francis of Assisi you will find that it was in such an act of love that his conversion first showed itself. Coming home from Rome, he met a leper covered with sores—a man whom everyone with a speck of æsthetic feeling would avoid. He flung his arms round the man's neck and kissed him. The love of Christ had broken down that barrier of repugnance as it has done for many—hospital nurses and others—whose motive was not scientific interest in the case, but the sheer human compassion breaking through.

Sir Frederick Treves, in his book of literary

sketches taken from his medical experience, tells the story of a man afflicted with a dreadful disease which made him a kind of human monster. He was known as the "Elephant man," and when Treves came across him first, he was being shown for a few coppers somewhere in the East End of London—the very picture of dejection and despair. Later on, when he was cast on the streets, a place was found for him through the kindness of the surgeon, in the London Hospital. At first it was difficult to make him feel that anyone cared. His "fear of people's eyes, the dread of being always stared at, the lash of the cruel mutterings of the crowd" were with him still. The attention of the nurses doing their difficult work was rather formal. "They did not help him to feel that he was of their kind; on the contrary, they, without knowing it, made him aware that the gulf of separation was immeasurable." Then came a lady who at the surgeon's request came into his room, wished him good morning, and shook him by the hand. He burst into tears. It was the first time a woman had smiled on him, the first time one had taken him by the hand. From that time his transformation from a hunted beast into a man began. And it was completed when one day Queen Alexandra paid him a special visit. She entered his room

smiling, shook him by the hand, and talked to him as a person she was glad to see. After that everything was changed. He used to remark, "I am happy every hour of the day." It was the human touch which broke through all the barriers and brought his soul out of the Castle of Despair into the pilgrim way, and set him with his face to the Celestial City.

But there was a barrier even greater for a Jew—that of ceremonial religion. A leper was ceremonially, as well as physically, unclean. He was outside the religious pale. Before he could come back to worship and be received by religious society, he had to be ceremonially cleansed by the priest. Otherwise he remained an outcast, and anyone who touched him was by that act ceremonially unclean—regarded as unfit to approach God or to associate with religious people. The caste barrier in India to-day is an illustration of the same thing. But by His touch Jesus broke down that barrier and stood in with the man, or, rather, stood out with him, for by that touch, according to the conventions of His time, He put Himself out of fellowship with the strictly religious. It is difficult for us to realise what this meant. But it meant something so amazing that, as Mr. Micklem says, "the greatest miracle that Jesus wrought, greater



than all His physical miracles, was the miracle of that loving compassion by which He touched the leper in a land where ritual uncleanness was held to be the direst of crimes."

We cannot help people without that touch of identification that breaks through the barriers. It may be the barrier of respectability created by virtuous pride, a barrier which is really the fruit of a wrong religion. How do we treat a man who has gone wrong? Would we care to be found in his company, to have him at our house, to risk the sneers of people who would misunderstand? Have we love enough, in order to help him, to break through that prejudice? Or think of the barrier, which with some people is even stronger—that of social caste and class superiority. Would we associate with people of a different class, so that we might help them; and that not in patronage, but in sheer human sympathy, breaking the convention which divides people into classes by lines almost as sharp as that which cut off the leper in Christ's day? Jesus did that. Such fine-spun distinctions meant nothing to Him. It was enough for Him that there was a soul in need. Love overflowed the fences till they were sunk out of sight. It was not an easy thing even for Him to do, and that not because He was unwilling, but because He was made to suffer through

it. It is just here He met the shadow of the Cross. What was the Cross but His identification with all who sinned, so that He shared their suffering, their shame, and their struggle. That was how He was able to save. Could He have saved anyone but through the conviction He awakened that their loss was His loss, and their recovery part of His heaven?

### III

But that touch was also the touch of hope and confidence. There was no despair in it, no doubt. He knew that He could cure him, and He communicated that assurance. There is a kind of sympathy which is helpless because it is hopeless. "Poor fellow," it seems to say, "I feel so much for you, but I know the hopelessness of your position." That kind of sympathy can do something, but it cannot do much. It is the kind of thing, indeed, from which a suffering man may shrink, for it only adds to his despair, unless he is the type of man who finds in the sympathy of others the fuel to feed his own self-pity. The touch of Jesus had hope in it, and confidence, and victory. And through that confidence the springs of a new vitality were set flowing in this man's being.

This was one secret of His power all through.

He broke the fatal sense of impotence that shackles the will. He opened up to men a world in which neither fault nor habit could keep them out of newness of life, and He made them feel that to that world they belonged. In His presence they had confidence that enabled them to shake off the paralysing suggestions of their own past failures. It is the communication of this confidence that is the secret of all faith-healing. All things for the salvation of others become possible to him that believeth and can communicate his confidence.

This confidence is what we need if we are to help people. It is what it means to have a Gospel—the consciousness of a power that can redeem the worst. Do we meet people who are down, with that assurance of a redemption which can lift them to their feet? If we look into the work of men like Wesley, who have quickened the lives of multitudes as it were by a word, we will find that part of the secret lay in this assurance, this confidence, that Christ could save the worst. All redeeming work finds its power in the assurance that God can work miracles. Do we carry that with us when we meet people who are in trouble about their lives? It is just the moral impotence that comes of hopelessness that is wrong with many people. They need someone who can speak to them with the authority of

experience, of a love which can set them on their feet, and so disarm their fears and their despair.

We can carry this confidence even to people whose case is physically hopeless. We may not be able to assure them of recovery, but we can assure them of something better. We can meet them with a sympathy and understanding that has gone down into the very valley of the shadow through which they are passing, and has there discovered in the darkness a rod and staff of comfort able to make them victorious even in death. That sympathy only has real value which has in it the confidence that even in hopeless sickness they can win a victory of the spirit. That alone is redeeming which has imaginatively faced the worst and found in it the resources of God. All other sympathy is weakening.

#### IV

There are two things worth realising. The first is that we can know the touch of Jesus to-day. Just because He is what He is, that touch is still possible. We can feel it as we think of Him, even as we read the printed page, as we meet people who have His spirit. Across the crowded centuries we can feel it. Nothing is more certain than this sense of immediacy which Christ creates. To think of Him is to

become possessed by a strange assurance that He is inescapable. There is a suggestion about the very name of Jesus, even about some of His simplest words, that is unique. It can open closed doors. It awakens us to a knowledge of ourselves. He knows all about us. For some people it would seem He knows too much. That is why at first they cannot bear to think of Him ; for when they think of Him it is as if some dark place in their hearts were suddenly filled with a light in which all kinds of unpleasant things, buried things, begin to come to life. But His light is love ; that is the point to get clear. He knows the strength of the temptation, knows all the dim, unconscious things that made the wrong way easy. He understands. And He is with us, with our better self, in our struggle to be free. His touch, if only we are open to it and do not shrink from it, is the touch of victory and peace. There is no sore beyond His healing, no situation beyond His power to make us victorious in it. Jesus holds the hearts of the world to-day because they feel in Him a reservoir of inexhaustible moral energy on which they may draw—if only they know how. That is the conviction of all sorts of people in all the ages. Even now

His touch has still its ancient power,  
No word from Him can fruitless fall,



Even now, like the leper, we can break through the mistrust and fling ourselves at His feet in utter willingness for Him to put His touch upon us. He creates in us even the faith by which He can reach this redeeming contact.

(2) The second thing is that we can carry that touch of Jesus to others. It is difficult to see how else He is to reach many of those around us. Those who know intimately the secret story of human lives know how often the touch of some people, sometimes the unconscious touch, has closed the door to the whole spiritual world for others ; they have made it well-nigh impossible for these others to believe in the love of God, because they have withheld the love that can mediate it. Some people find it difficult to trust God because they have never got near to anyone whom they can wholeheartedly trust. Others cannot believe that God forgives, because some from whom they long for forgiveness pass them by with a cold look, or hold out to them a hand which is stiff with condemnation and contempt. The most challenging thing to reflect upon is that you and I have the power to mediate God to our fellows. What kind of spiritual universe is it to which we are introducing them as they meet us from day to day ? The human touch is the medium of the Divine. This is the truth

behind the doctrine known as the Apostolic Succession—the doctrine that by the touch of episcopal hands all down the centuries the grace of God finds its way. The idea of a mechanically transmitted grace is unthinkable. How much of the grace of God could some of the ecclesiastics of the Middle Ages, with their vice and cunning, let through ! But there is a true doctrine of which that is only the perversion ; it is the doctrine of the human contacts of personality upon personality by which ordinary people mediate the love and grace of God. The very touch of God may get through in the words we speak, in the grip of a hand, in the passing of some trivial gift. It is in this power to reveal God that we come to our true self-fulfilment. To know this touch of God and transmit it is the priceless privilege of life.

## TRANSFORMING FRIENDSHIP

LUKE v.—“And Jesus went forth and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom ; and He said unto him, Follow Me, and he left all, and rose up and followed Him.”

LUKE tells this story as if it were a matter of everyday occurrence. Jesus is coming along the busiest street in Capernaum, where the traffic from east to west and west to east is pouring through. There sits Levi, a tax collector, assessing the customs and taking in the money. As He passes, Jesus just calls to Levi, “Follow Me,” and without a word the man rises from his seat, closes his books, puts away his money, and follows Jesus. It is as dramatic as that.

But when one gets below the surface, how much it tells about Jesus ! It is by such little things that the hidden secret of a man's personality is revealed. One could imagine a man in Palestine talking to his friends about Jesus, and trying to describe the kind of man He was. One can hear him saying, “This is the kind of man Jesus is. You know Matthew, the publican, who sat at the cross-roads ? You know the sort of fellow he is ? Not the kind of man to be caught by moonshine, not the

sentimental fellow whose heart is easy to reach. Well, Jesus just passed along the road, looked at him, and said, 'Follow Me,' and without a word Matthew rose and followed Him! That is the kind of man that Jesus is."

And it tells us a good deal about Matthew, about what was going on within his soul. "I have been taught over and over again," says Mark Rutherford, "that unknown abysses, into which the sun never shines, lie covered with commonplace in men and women, and are only revealed by the rarest opportunity." There was something about Levi which no one ever suspected, which laid him open to the appeal of Jesus, so that the rich, vulgar, grasping tax collector became a disciple. All this is in the simple story.

## I

Let us think of these two as they face each other. And, first of all, of Matthew. He was the last kind of man of whom you would have suspected it possible for Christ to make a disciple. He was a Jew, but one who was regarded as a traitor to his race. He had become a tax collector for the Romans, who held Palestine in subjection. His fellow-countrymen despised him accordingly, and little wonder! The taxes were the symbols of the Roman dominion, and

the collectors did not limit themselves to collecting them, but were in the habit of making as much as they could out of their job to line their own pockets. They had sold their birthright for money. They were out to become rich quickly, and by the easiest road, which is not always the cleanest. Besides this, they did not keep the Jewish Law. They neglected the synagogue. They never went to church. They did not even keep the Sabbath. For Jesus to be friendly with them, as a writer says, is like a minister of religion becoming friendly with a woman of the fastest set in society, or with a book-maker at the races. Matthew was the type of person who had thrown over religion and become a pagan. There are plenty of such folk to-day, neither better nor worse than Matthew—people with easy-going morals, who want to make the most of life on its material side. Very unpromising material, as we might imagine, for religion. But Jesus saw deeper.

For one thing, He saw a man who was not satisfied with what he was getting out of life. He was, it is true, making money fast. He lived well and had plenty of friends. He was free of all those restraints of religion and its habits of worship, which the earthly souls of many people rebel against in secret, but which they will not give up, because in their hearts they suspect

that somehow through these customs they may reach the good of life. Matthew had broken with many of these conventions. Yet he was not happy. He had a strange feeling sometimes, in his quiet hours, that he was missing the secret of life. There was a good deal more in all the feasting and jollity than appeared. How many of these merry evenings were just a kind of unconscious attempt at escape—refuge for an empty soul? Matthew and his kind were seeking life. They were out for the gratification of their instincts. They had come to the conclusion that the Pharisees' way was not the road to life, and they were trying another way. Their type, when Jesus pictured them, was the prodigal son, who flung himself out of his father's house, into the far country, to snatch at joy and exhilaration, and, like the prodigal, they were not finding them. Jesus saw all that. He saw the hungry soul determined to find reality, and in the search for it taking the wrong road.

One wonders if we always see that. We condemn the man who goes wrong, plunging into what we call the world, into some whirlpool of pleasure and indulgence. We condemn him, when in reality we should regard him with sympathy. He is seeking life, seeking the satisfaction of what is really biggest within his



soul—his freedom, his self-expression—really seeking God, though he does not know it. Perhaps we are to blame, like the Pharisees, that our way of life and our influence give them no suggestion that in our company and in our home they will find life. Perhaps Matthew had a father who was a Pharisee, and a bad Pharisee ; the kind of father who made religion repellent, so that he could not think of it without a cold shudder, and never got over his prejudice far enough to take a good square look at it for himself. Yet he was not satisfied, and Jesus, when He looked, saw the hunger of his spirit in his eyes.

But there was more. Matthew was uneasy in that business of his. Something in him secretly revolted at his way of life. He loathed the meanness of it ; the ceaseless bickering ; the tricks he had to use ; the injustices into which he was compelled. Deep in his heart he had his own ideal vision of life—a thing clean and sweet and kind and simple. There are many people who feel just like that to-day. Perhaps there is little of the conviction of sin such as we find in Bunyan and in the age of the great revivals, when men called on the hills to cover them from what they felt was the wrath of God. But no one can read much in modern literature without discovering a real sense of sin, a real disquiet with

a life that is poor and mean and trivial—a real loathing for the soul that is smirched with wrong desire and tainted with a hundred petty insincerities. In John Masefield's *Everlasting Mercy*, the village sot has his moments of sublime longing, when he would fain break away, if only he could. After his conversion he confesses it.

I wondered then what life might be ;  
And what would be the end of me,  
When youth and health and strength were gone  
And cold old age came creeping on.

And, looking round, I felt disgust  
At all the nights of drink and lust ;  
At all the looks of all the swine  
Who said that they were friends of mine.

It may be that Levi had never plunged very deeply, that he had never been through the darkest of the mire. But he knew in his heart that his life was not clean, that his rotten trade had left its mark on him, as a rotten trade always does. He longed for a life that was sweet and true and honest, in which he could look into the eyes of his fellows without shame, and up at the sky and the hills in their beauty without feeling that somehow he was a kind of uneasy blot upon God's world.

And yet, when Christ saw Levi, He saw something that He missed in the Pharisees. He

saw a real sincerity, a real openness of mind. They wore masks ; they kept up appearances ; their goodness was largely external respectability, and their very pride in it kept them from understanding Jesus, or seeing anything better than themselves. They had their own kind of goodness, but " the good is often the enemy of the best." Levi and his friends were open. They knew themselves for what they were. They did not need to be unmasked. They had no illusions which Christ would need to strip away. They would not be humbugged with any false goodness, and, therefore, they were open to the real thing and ready to recognise it when it came.

That was Levi as Christ saw him. A man dissatisfied, restless, but conscious of his defects and therefore open to the light. Perhaps Christ caught him at what is called the psychological moment, for there is such a moment—a " malleable moment," as Meredith calls it. It comes to every individual. It may come at any time—a fact which ought to make us very careful how we live, for we never know who may be just waiting for the touch or the word that will awaken life. Perhaps Christ found Levi at such a moment, or perhaps it was His presence which awoke this half-conscious hunger in his soul, for that is part of His power. But, in any case,

the thing happened. Jesus called to Levi, "Follow Me," and, without a word, he rose up and followed Him.

## II

You cannot read a story like this without realising there is something in Christ wonderfully winsome, wonderfully satisfying. What was it, or, rather, what is it?

There is His wonderful friendship. As Levi looked into the eyes of Christ, he knew that Christ loved him; that He was his friend. There was none of the cold, stern look of condemnation there, but the look of understanding, of that sympathy with all his longings, with his better self, which is true friendship. It was the unseen Levi that Jesus saw and claimed—the man within. It was that to which He spoke when He said, "Levi"; and Levi must have felt the friendship in His tone. There are various tones in which we can speak to people. There is a tone that is acid, chilly, contemptuous, in which you feel that the man who uses it is identifying you with your worst. Levi was used to that tone; he heard practically nothing else, except among his own particular friends. But there is another tone in which you hear the voice of one who recognises and is speaking to what is good in

you, to the self which is perhaps buried. Then the miracle happens which Matthew Arnold describes :

When our world-deafened ear  
Is by the touch of a loved voice caressed,  
A bolt is shot back somewhere in the breast,  
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again ;  
The eye sinks inward and the heart lies plain ;  
And what we mean, we say,  
And what we would, we know.

In short, we come to ourselves. So Levi became conscious of his hidden self, became conscious that it was his true self, his real self ; and at Christ's touch that hidden self arose and took command, and Levi stepped out, ready for anything in the way of adventure.

That kind of atmosphere of creative friendliness is part of the magnetism of Jesus. There are some people skilled in cutting diamonds. They have the power to take the rough, dull bit of stone into their hands, and, bit by bit, the precious glittering gem is released to burn with beauty. Some people can do that with words. A poet can take a simple word that on our lips passes prosy and unrecognised, and can give it a setting in which it becomes alive with beauty. Jesus did that with men. He takes into His company men like the disciples, like Levi, dull, rough, and sometimes vulgar.

Then the habits of years, the stains of wrong desire, are thrown off, and they rise into a new selfhood, and the soul is released. Condemnation does not do it. It may chip the jewel ; it cannot release the hidden splendour. It may make men loathe and hate their sin. It cannot set free the soul, shackled in weakness with long defeat. There was that in Christ which condemned the things that tainted Levi. "A true friend," says Emerson, "is a kind of beautiful enemy." Though He stooped in friendship, He never stooped in compromise with evil. Levi would have had no respect for Him if He had. His friendship had the light of a love which attracted while it condemned, and condemned while it attracted. For the lack of that combination we often go wrong. We are ready enough to condemn, but our righteousness has no allurements in it ; nothing to make the men so drawn to it that they hate what it condemns. Only where it is *love* that condemns, is there power to redeem ; and Jesus had that kind of love, so that when He called to Levi, there was something that chimed like music in his soul, and leaped to call Him Master.

But there was more than mere friendship in Christ's contact with Levi. There was something that satisfied his longing. A man does



not leave a rich and comfortable living to follow a mere caprice. Levi was no fool. He wanted life, and nothing but life would satisfy him, and in Jesus he saw it. He saw a way of service to men, of self-forgetfulness, in which he knew he would lose himself to find himself. He saw a better way of satisfying his ambition by serving men than by robbing them. He saw a fuller life to be reached through giving himself away than through grasping and meanness. It may be he saw a way of serving his nation free from the narrow patriotism which disgusted him in the national leaders. For, if we read Levi aright, one of the things that had made him a rebel was that he had sickened at the national pride that looked on every foreigner as an enemy, and at the class distinctions associated with religion that regarded every sinner as an outcast. In Christ he saw a vision that soared above all these confusions. He saw the vision of a God who is Father, who has a heart big enough even to take in the publican and the outcast and the foreigner. He saw in Christ a leader in whose service he could serve God in reality—not as the Pharisees, with conventional goodness and fastings and long prayers, but in right living and simple kindness and the love that redeems; all the buried longings for life and reality that current religion had stifled

and driven into the wilderness, rose up in him to call Christ, Lord.

Perhaps this is to read too much into the mind of Levi. But no man becomes a rebel like him out of mere wantonness. How many of our sceptics, the people we call irreligious, the respectable pagans, as well as those who are not respectable, are in the wilderness not because they want to be there, but because, at heart, they are seeking for life, revolting against unreality. The God they have seen in the churches is not big enough for them. They have turned from religion and its ways because they have never felt the attraction of real goodness. Christ came to find such rebels as these, and to lead them back into a real religion, a religion which offers life for all their instincts, and, in the adventure of it, freedom and satisfaction. And surely we are misrepresenting Christ, unless we can so reveal Him that His religion means life.

Levi came to Christ and he found life. But notice what follows. He made a great feast in his house. Why? To celebrate his joy, to give his friends a chance to meet his Lord? The real fact is that he had lost nothing, nothing that was worth losing, when he left his old trade and all it stood for. Rather, in Christ, he had found the key to the real joy of life—a friendship

in which all that had been real remained. Tolstoi's experience at his conversion is illuminating. It was a re-discovery of life. He had been a pagan, if ever man was ; no aspect of satisfaction was left unexplored in the search for life—art, war, reckless self-indulgence. But all the time, as he afterwards confessed, there was this uneasy feeling that the real secret had eluded him. Then came the discovery. "I remembered that I only lived at those times when I believed in God. I need only be aware of God to live. 'What more do you seek?' exclaimed a voice within me. 'This is He. He is that without which one cannot live. To know God and to live is one and the same thing. God is life!' And more than ever before, all within me and around me lit up, and the light did not again abandon me. . . . And strange to say, the strength of life which returned to me was not new but quite old, the same that had borne me along in my earliest days." When the prodigal went out that morning he was seeking life. He wanted music and dancing—thrills of all kinds. But he found that he had taken the wrong road, so he came back ; and then, Jesus tells us, he found the music and dancing in his father's house. Some of us have been seeking the true joy of life and have missed it. Christ has the secret of

that heavenly music that has haunted yet eluded us. If only we will focus the longing for it upon Him, it will break into a prayer and a resolution: "I will arise and go to my Father."

## A PAGAN'S PATHWAY TO FAITH

MATTHEW viii.—“ Verily, I have not found so great faith ;  
no, not in Israel.”

THIS is a very touching and a very illuminating story. Often Christ had to awaken faith before He could heal. Here He found a great faith waiting for Him. It is worth noting that He commended this man's faith, and that for the one reason for which faith is valuable, that it created the atmosphere in which He could work. It fulfilled the condition which brought His power into play. What a faith it was ! What a wonderful idea this man had of Jesus ! He had such belief in the power of His love to reach the roots of human trouble that he did not even ask Him to come to his house, bringing the touch of His hand, the comfort of His voice, the look from those eyes reflecting the sunlight of heaven. He saw in Christ a power which was independent of circumstances and free of all limitations ; a love that could find immediate access to the mysterious depths of a soul in need, and touch the springs of life. He had no theological views about Jesus, but for him Christ was Lord—Master of the whole secret region in the soul of man, where life fights with death ; and he knew

that before that commanding will of goodness, if only it were brought into play, nothing evil in the whole universe could stand. He recognised that touch of authority before which men will lay down their lives, and Christ had it—had it there, where all that debases and cripples man's personality is cast out by love. Such was His power that He had only to speak the word and the thing would be done. This was the quality of the centurion's faith. The result of it was that somehow the love of Christ was released, and the man was healed; and Jesus commended this man's faith as something which, if only men had it on a wide scale, would have enabled Him to change the very heart of the world. "Verily, I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel."

## I

The question that naturally interests us is how this man came to have this faith. He was a Roman soldier, a pagan, an alien, and, therefore, one who was not likely to see in a Jewish peasant a world-transforming power. It would be very difficult for him, with such traditions and training as his, to appreciate Jesus; but is it not rather a startling thing that those who in His own day seemed to appreciate Jesus best, were those who stood outside the religious world of



Palestine—the heathen, the outcast, the prodigal? There are signs of this even in our own day. It is very interesting, very searching, to realise that some of those outside the churches have a feeling about Jesus which reaches nearer to worship than that of some of the people within. Mr. H. G. Wells sums up his picture of Him by the confession that “He is too great for our small hearts,” and Mr. Middleton-Murry in his *Life of Jesus* comes to this conclusion: “Keep we our heads as high as we can, they shall be bowed at the last.” But there is a kind of worship of Him which has the effect of putting Him on a pedestal from which He cannot reach us, and is really a way of escape from His demand. This man had no theological ideas about Jesus. His faith was natural and simple. How did he come to have it? There is no question more worth asking, for, unless the New Testament is a fairy-tale, and the history of Christianity untrue, this faith in Christ is the one thing the lack of which, for many people, is making the world a place of failure and strife and misery. How came this pagan to see in Christ a love which he could trust in perfect confidence?

The secret is to be found in the man’s attitude to all those among whom he lived. He could see the good in all sorts of people—Jew and Gentile, rich and poor. All the barriers that keep so

many of us from rightly valuing others were, in his case, down. He was a worshipper of heathen gods ; yet he could see what was good in the Jews with their vastly different faith. He was a Roman ; yet he could appreciate fine qualities in people of another race. He was free from the race prejudice and race contempt which were rabid in the world of his day. " He loveth our nation," they said of him, " and hath built us a synagogue." He was an officer of the army of occupation in Palestine, and yet he had no feeling of superiority to a subject people, none of that pride which is fostered by militarism, with its belief in force. He was a man of rank ; yet he had made a friend of his servant and felt for him so deep and real an affection that the man's sickness brought genuine pain. In short, this centurion had come to a real sense of the value of men as men. He saw them, not as soldiers, or slaves, or foreigners, or subjects—those familiar labels that seem to tell us so much, and yet tell us so little. His view was not clouded by social prejudice ; he saw them just as men and women, with their own gifts, their own troubles, their own worth and value. Rags or jewels made no difference in his attitude to people. He had seen through all that, through to the man behind.

Now, that is a very wonderful thing. It

prompts us to ask ourselves how far we have found our way into this world of real human values, and are living in it. Do we respect men and women just because they are men and women, whatever their birth or status? Have we the insight and sympathy which gives us release from the wrong values and artificial outlook that so often distorts our view, and infects our attitude with false respect or unworthy disdain. It is what Jesus meant by love, this moral valuation of personality. We have only to look below the surface to find how much our social and industrial trouble is due to the fact that our sense of human values has been, in one way or the other, obscured. There are many things that obscure it. A hundred years ago, children were set to work in mines and factories, because their human value was obscured by what was thought to be economic necessity. The real root of war is the fact that this human value is hidden for the moment by what is felt to be the duty of patriotism. In a book written during the Great War, Mr. Clutton Brock makes this vividly clear: "If it had been possible for these dutiful Prussians to see the Belgian country people in the summer weather of 1914, making ready to gather in their harvest; if it had been possible for them, with their duty-blinded eyes, to see mother and father with their

children in a cottage, and not only to see, but like a poet or some other poor fool, to feel their hopes and fears, to be like them, to be them for a moment ; and then in another moment to see a smoking ruin, the father hanging from his apple tree and the mother mad, and the forgotten baby crying for milk, then they could never have done what they did. . . . To them it would never have been Germany invading Belgium, one abstraction doing a necessary wrong to another, but men killing men, and driving women mad, and starving children who had done them no wrong, and all through a sense of duty to a word."

The fact is we are all more or less smothered by conventional prejudices ; blinded by race contempt, by false social values for which our early training is often responsible. This man was free. He was a kind of natural child of God. His world of men was a big human family. How he had come into this freedom we do not know. What shaft of light had struck the fetters from his mind ? Perhaps it was the kind of home in which he had been brought up. It may have been a love for his mother, or for some friend, which, breaking into his heart, had given him a respect for all mothers and enabled him to see all men as possible friends. This is the kind of outlook which Jesus produces in

people—in men like Shaftesbury and Lincoln and St. Francis of Assisi—great humans all of them, who had shaken their feet clear of all the superiorities of pride or status, and come into a world where other people are just men like themselves. And by that touch of kinship they found the secret of their power. Mr. Chesterton in his *Life of St. Francis* points this out: “What gave him his extraordinary personal power was this: that from the Pope to the beggar, from the Sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown, burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernardone was really interested in him; in his own inner individual life from the cradle to the grave; that he himself was being valued and taken seriously, and not merely added to the spoils of some social policy or to the names in some clerical document.”

## II

Now perhaps you will ask what all this has to do with the centurion's faith in Christ. If we think for a moment what faith is, we shall understand. Faith is our response to what we see in Jesus. It is an impulse of trust which is awakened by our vision of that in Him which meets our need. Faith cannot function at all,

except through the vision of Jesus, bursting into our hearts to quicken wonder and love. And many people cannot see Jesus in His reality because they are not free. Their minds are bound by prejudice of one kind and another. The same barriers that keep us from a true understanding of one another and a true valuation of one another, may stand between us and Jesus. This man had a free and unprejudiced mind. He did not need, for instance, to get over the fact that Jesus was a Jew and a peasant, and, so far as he knew, a rebellious subject who was likely to give some trouble to an officer of the Roman army. It never occurred to him to say what the Jews said about Jesus, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" and with that, dismiss Him. He had got over that kind of prejudice which, in some people, made it intolerable for them during the war to sing a hymn by a German author, though written perhaps some four hundred years ago; which in others makes it difficult to see in a man like Gandhi—just because they dislike his politics—one in some ways more nearly Christian than many of us. This centurion was free from all these mists that cloud the judgment and blind our eyes, and when he met with Christ His true glory struck into his soul. He found, in Him, the incarnation of what he



really valued, of all that was highest in manhood—the goodness and love by which he had unconsciously striven to live. For the real quality of the soul of Jesus, the real nature of His goodness, the source of His power and loveliness, is just this perfect love for people. It is this power to value men and women for themselves, and to see in them all, whatever their race or status or character, the children of the Father.

But there was more. This man had realised in his own life the power of this attitude to others. What joy it had brought into his own life ! What friendships it had given him with all sorts of people ! And what difficult problems it had helped him to solve ! It was no easy thing for the Roman soldiers to live at peace with these turbulent Jews, who all the time hated them and what they stood for. To do so must have given them many a perplexing moment. But this man had found the key to their hearts ; he had discovered how to make friends of potential enemies. And, as he stood before Jesus, it flashed upon him that here was One who was Master in that field of love ; here was One who had at His disposal all its resources and wielded to the full the only power which could penetrate men's hearts and start the springs of new life there. It may be that he

realised an even deeper thing—that here, in Christ, was the source of that spirit that had been moving in his own life and had made him what he was. In any case, his whole soul fell captive to the personality of Jesus. “Speak the word only,” he said, “and my servant shall be healed,” and through that faith the love of Christ was set free.

### III

Now, what does this suggest to us? Does it not suggest this, for one thing, that the value we have for Jesus, His worth to us, which is the root of His power in our lives, is bound up with the value we have for other people? To put it quite clearly, people who do not love others, whatever their rank or race, do not really love Christ in the true sense of the word. They are living in an artificial world. If they really examined themselves, they would discover that, beneath all false respect for people, what they really love is money, or rank, or whatever else ministers to their own pride. Christ does not appeal to some, because their real interest in others has never been awakened. They have never tried to break through the mesh of conventional prejudices that tie up the mind and affect one's attitude to people. For

we often see each other, not as men and women like ourselves, but as Frenchmen or Germans or Trade Unionists or Capitalists—accidents of birth or training, which have nothing to do with a man's real value to the world, or to God. Thus we find it difficult to be free, or simple, or kind, and all our contacts with others are artificial from the start. These barriers run right across the world and touch all our relationships.

My friend and I have built a wall  
Between us, thick and wide ;  
The stones of it are high with scorn,  
And plastered thick with pride.

We talk across those stubborn stones,  
So arrogantly tall ;  
Only we cannot touch our hands,  
Since we have built the wall.

Money may build a wall ; circumstances may build it ; a conscious sense of our own virtue may build it ; resentment to others may build that wall. What tragic misunderstandings are due to such barriers. But the awful thing is that by them we shut out the glory of Christ ; we make ourselves incapable of seeing His love for us and for all men. For, however we may seem to feel the love of Christ for ourselves, we have never seen it in its reality unless we have seen it as a love that takes all men in ; and the first sign that

it is reaching our hearts is that we also begin to take all men in.

What is more, we have no real faith in Christ, save as our faith is in that love of His which values everyone, the prodigal and the saint, the rich and the poor, and we see in that love the only real power in the world. For true faith in Christ is the conviction that His love is power. Till we have come to see this love as power, however dimly, we have no solution for any of our real difficulties, no Gospel by which we can live. Does not our own peace come through our faith in His utter love for ourselves, whatever we have been or done? Through this faith He saves us and transforms us by delivering us from ourselves and from the accusing voices of our own hearts. And the only way in which He can save the world is through this same love, brought into action by our faith in it. Was not His whole effort in the world the effort to persuade men and women to become one human family, and to see each other and deal with each other as we see and deal with our own brothers and sisters? The root idea of the Kingdom of God is a world become one family. If we came to treat others with the same tenderness, the same generosity, the same forgiveness, the same open comradeship as we find in the best kind of home, how many of our social and industrial troubles would

begin to find their solution! For this is the nature of the world in which we live, that the real difficulties can never be overcome save in the atmosphere of love.

#### IV

But the question is, how to reach this attitude? The first step is to revise our values of people. It is to determine to see the best in others, to believe in it, to trust it, and to make adventures of friendship. How often do we give others credit for the same ideals as are in ourselves, especially if they do not belong to our circle—and insist on meeting them on that basis? We have to use imagination. In a book recently published, containing a diary of some months at the Front during the war, the writer tells how his whole soul revolted at times against the inhumanity of it. “Of course, one does not mention this out here, knowing it would be regarded as humanitarian rot; nevertheless, it seems to me that when imagination has grown a little stronger in man, not only will he find war impossible, but he will find higher uses for his energy in peace than the blind and pitiless self-assertion that makes so many of his present activities forms of war.” Before Ezekiel the prophet opened his mouth to tell the exiles in

Babylon what he thought about them, he was bidden to go and sit where they sat. For ten days or so he lived with them, and when he began to speak, there was a tenderer note in his voice. The beginning of a new outlook is to see in other lives a value that is, at least, as great as that in our own ; and this is surely the root of what Christ means by loving people as ourselves. Most of all, it is to see in Christ a love which is not in ourselves, and to open our hearts to it, praying that He will deepen this love in us, which is the entering in of His own spirit. This does not mean that we shall become unnatural ! It actually means that we shall become truly natural—truly ourselves. For the first effect of a genuine contact with Christ is “ to clear our minds of the nonsense that dulls the pang of our own natural pity.”

It may be that all we are capable of, to begin with, is a confession and a longing, in which there is only a spark of hope.

I am unjust, but I can strive for justice.

My life's unkind, but I can vote for kindness.

I, the unlovely, say life should be lovely.

I that am blind, cry out against my blindness.

It may be that, like the centurion, the awakened love for other people, as we see them in their bitter need and helplessness, will throw us open to the love that can alone heal ourselves, and



bring healing to the world. It is not seldom that he who has not felt the need of Christ for himself, has come to feel it through the aching need to help another. And, bit by bit, the faith in Him will grow through which miraculous things will begin to happen, and, for us and others, a new day will begin to dawn.

## STANDING ON OUR FEET

EZEKIEL ii.—“ And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice that said to me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee.”

JOHN xv.—“ I call you not slaves, but friends.”

**I**T was not in a very inspiring time that God first called Ezekiel to his life-work, nor in a very inspiring place. It was in the hour of his nation's bitterest humiliation, when they were captives in Babylon ; and it was down with these captives, exiled among strangers, that Ezekiel had the call to become a messenger of hope. Yet this is true to the experience of history, for it is just when things are at their darkest that, for men with faith enough to look up, light breaks in the sky, and “ the worst turns the best to the brave.”

Ezekiel was a man of vivid imagination. He saw things in pictures, in strange luminous symbols ; and in the first chapter of his book we are apt to be lost in a confusion of wheels and wings. But the point of it all is, that, in his own way, Ezekiel had a vision of the glory of God, which is the beginning of vital religion. It is this awareness of the wonder and the glory of God which is the soul's awakening. It may come to us in various ways. To Moses it came

in the sight of a desert bush, blazing in the beauty of a sunlit morning ; to others it has come in the appeal of a little child ; to others in a sudden sense of the Divine wonder of human love, brought home to the heart perhaps in some poignant moment of grief. Most of all, of course, it comes in some glimpse of the face of God in Jesus Christ. When it came to Ezekiel, he fell on his face, with all his being prostrate before the majesty of the vision. And then a curious thing happened. As he lay thus, in a kind of paralysis of the spirit, feeling his weakness, his nothingness, a voice said to him, " Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee." And he stood, and God gave him his commission and his call.

## I

Now, that seems a very strange experience. We should have imagined that to lie upon one's face, or at least to fall upon one's knees, was the kind of posture that the occasion demanded. What else would seem fitting to a man who sees the glory of God ? And yet, when we think of it, are there not two kinds of prostration in that Presence ? There is a kind of awe, a feeling of sheer abasement, in which the heart is filled with fear and paralysing self-depreciation.

Primitive man had that kind of attitude to his god. He felt in the presence of such an awful force that, if he did not do something to propitiate it, mysterious misfortunes, sickness, and death in his family or among his cattle, or what not, would befall him. He felt himself in the presence of a spirit, wholly terrible, wholly crushing, capricious beyond his power to understand. That is religious fear in the wrong sense of the word. It is a sense of dependence which does not inspire, but demoralises one's manhood—the dependence of a slave upon a master whom he distrusts. There is no assurance in it ; no happiness ; none of that trust which a child has for his father, which enables him to be himself, and makes the home a place both of reverence and freedom. That kind of awe is often mistaken for a religious feeling. It comes upon us sometimes in the heart of great mountains, or in some dark, mysterious forest, or in certain gloomy mediæval cathedrals. A modern writer miscalls it “ the sense of the Holy.” There are certain religions in which the deliberate effort is made to awaken it. But the truth is, that there is no real religion in such feelings. God does not seek to have His creatures crushed before Him by a sense of His mere power and sovereignty, like a crowd of slaves. Was not this what the voice meant when it spake to Ezekiel

and said, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet?"

There is another kind of awe before God—the awe inspired by His love, His mercy, His goodness, His righteousness. One who had been brought out of the cringing fear in which there is no peace, into a sense of God's love that had changed her life, said to me, "I am just bowed down with amazement and awe at the love of Jesus Christ." It is such amazement and awe that purifies and, at the same time, lifts us into friendship. For that love breaks our pride and brings us to our knees, by the very might of the lowliness that stoops to raise us. Is not this the meaning of the voice that came to Ezekiel, as he lay crushed and paralysed by his first impression of God's glory? He saw something deeper. He saw God's love, His friendship, His will to use him, not as a tool, but as an ally. He saw the meaning of that word which Jesus afterwards used to His disciples, "I call you not slaves, but friends." He heard a voice that said, "Stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee."

## II

Now, let us look into this and see what it means with regard to our own attitude to God. Does it not mean, in the first place, that God

calls us into a real confidence—in which we are sure of Him, and are, therefore, sure of ourselves?

There are two views of God which are still found in the attitude of people to-day.

Religion, says a modern writer, runs through three stages. “It is the transition from God the void to God the enemy ; and from God the enemy to God the companion.” The trouble is that the experience may stop for us at any of these stages, and many people are suffering from arrested development in their religious outlook. They have never got beyond the thought of God as mere might. They feel they cannot get close to Him ; they are not at home in the thought of His presence. He represents the impersonal majesty of the moral law, and that is all. It is little wonder that religion does not sound to them a very happy thing ; not the kind of thing which can awaken a song in the heart ; or bring a new colour into the beauty of the world, or give the feeling of a big, dependable friend. It is from this sense of God’s overpowering majesty that the appeal to the saints and prayers to the Virgin in the Roman Church have sprung. They have taken Christ and put Him on a splendid throne, and made of Him a figure like that pictured in the Book of Revelations, with eyes of fire and a sharp sword in His



mouth ; till there is nothing for it but to ask His gentle mother, who still has contact with human things, to pray for them to Him—to Him, whose only trouble with men was that they would not let Him be their friend.

That fear of God is a case of arrested religious development.

For Jesus, God is infinite and of infinite power ; but His infinity is of mercy and His power is the power of love. That was the message and the feeling about God that He brought to all sorts of people whom life had cowed and crushed. They were constantly being humiliated by superiors—religious dignitaries, government officials ; and they felt that God was like that, and the only way to approach Him was by crawling to His feet like slaves. The first effect of the message of Jesus was to set such broken men on their feet. “ I want your fellowship in confidence,” He said to them, in effect, “ not your fearsome obedience.” God wants the reverence of our love, not the cowed respect of our hearts for His might. He wants a free man’s worship, not a slave’s servility. His is a friendship that respects our personality because He loves us. “ Realise your son-ship,” “ Stand upon thy feet, and God will speak to thee.”

As He went through the world, He found

people who were crushed by all sorts of things, and so had lost confidence in themselves. Some felt overwhelmed by the giant forces of nature. They realised how helpless were their lives in the grasp of the mighty universe, and they had projected this picture upon God. Jesus pointed to the flowers of the field, how God cared for them, and to the birds of the air, and how God loved them. "How much more doth God care for you!" He said. Shake off the weight of this oppressive, dwarfing universe. See it lit with love. See it as the Father's house—the home in which He meant you to live with Him, as His children.

And he found people who were crushed by a sense of their inferiority. They saw this one and that, with superior mind and capacity. The more they thought about it, the more their own poor endowments seemed to shrink into insignificance. Nothing can be so depressing as this sense of inferiority. It was this Jesus condemned in the parable of the talents. He pictured a man who had only one talent, and, because he had only one, he did not think it was worth his while to cultivate it, so he buried it in a napkin out of sight where it could win no profit, and so wasted his opportunity. Are there not many people like that still? They will not accept themselves as they are, and recognise

their own worth, their true quality ; they spend their days in a constant morass of self-depreciation, sometimes mistaking it for humility, when in point of fact it may be only a disguised form of pride and resentment against life. Self-depreciation is not humility. One of the greatest men of the last century in Scotland, who had a gift akin to genius, was so humble that nothing could exceed his sense of dependence on the grace of God, his willingness to learn and to see more deeply. But his biographer tells us that he never depreciated his gifts. He knew his own value and thanked God for it. That is the attitude that Jesus calls on us to take. Whatever our gifts, seem they small or great, we have our own value to God and to His world. Let us believe in ourselves. Let us thank God for our own individuality. As someone says, "When God makes a man, He breaks the mould." There is no other in the world quite like ourselves, and God wants us just as we are for His fellowship. "Stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee."

There were people also who were crushed by a sense of past sin. Something in the past haunted them, and they could never get free of it. They grovelled in remorse before the vision of what they might have been ; and called their remorse repentance. But remorse is not repentance.

Repentance is not merely a mood of shame. It is an attitude to sin, an active rejection of it, and of all the evil that lies in the past. The message of Christ is that when we turn from sin we are forgiven, and the refusal to accept that forgiveness is the rejection of the love of God. Stand upon your feet ; be God's child ; thankful that you see your sin ; and thankful for the grace to turn from it. The truth is that a good deal of this grovelling which is mistaken for repentance is just a form of pride—the pride that refuses to accept ourselves as God's children, and demands a clean sheet in our own eyes, a thing which can never be. Even if our sins have shut some door of golden hope which can never open again, there is a place for us still, won even by this sad experience, which is all our own, and in which God can use us in ways which might not have been possible before. As Tertullian says, " Jesus Christ turns all our sunsets into sunrises." Countless people have found in the place of shame an equipment for helping others, which would not otherwise have been theirs. God can use all the odds and ends of human life, even the twisted bits of scrap that have been broken in some moral catastrophe. " Stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee."

## III

But, in the second place, does not this word mean that God wants us with all our active mind and will at work. We are not to be His slaves, His tools, but His friends.

This has its bearing on the discovery of truth in religion. No real friend would seek to impose his beliefs upon his fellow by the sheer weight of his influence. To ask another to receive the truth by this kind of coercion of his mind is to degrade his mind. And God does not ask us to accept His truth except through the insight by which we see it to be true. Far better possess the smallest fragment of a creed because we see it to be true, than take in the whole catechism upon the mere authority of others, however we respect them. The call of Jesus is a call to think for ourselves, to be open and sincere with His truth. Only so, will it come home with conviction ; only so, will God speak with us.

It is true, of course, that the truth of religion is a revelation of God. That means that He is always seeking to make Himself known to us. Even our search for Him, as Pascal says, is already the sign of His contact with us. But without that active search there can be no revelation, and the medium of it is the insight which

is awakened and deepened through sincerity with facts. The sad thing about much of our religious controversy is the evidence it brings that many Christian people are afraid of truth. They are afraid to think for themselves. It is really evidence that a man is not sure about his foundations when he is afraid to face calmly a position opposed to his own. However disturbing it may be, let us thank God for those who make us think, who disturb the comfortable slumber of the mind in which we might doze away to death. God wants a free man's mind, not the mind of a well-trained slave. He wants people who will think for themselves and will be honest with all the facts of life, and who will follow their own insight ; not those whose minds close, like a crab in the sea, on what they first find, whether it be their mother's creed or someone else's atheism. And only the creed into which we come through a real sincerity will ever hold us in the grip of temptation, much less shake us like a passion, or exult us like sunlight.

The trouble with many people in religion to-day is not that they are seeking and not finding<sup>13</sup>; it is that they are not seeking, and in some cases are asking a certainty in religion which will save them the perplexity of thinking for themselves—a certainty which no man can have, save at the cost of intellectual suicide. We need not



fear that honest thinking will lead us off the road. No man ever thought himself out of religion without thinking himself back again, if he went on long enough. For the search for truth will lead us to Jesus Christ. The moment we begin to seek an answer to the big questions He comes and stands before us. But before we can find Him truly we must be willing to throw aside all presuppositions, to see Him for ourselves. We must even, as a writer says, be willing, if need be, to let Christ go, if we would find Him as the truth. For He is the truth. It is possible to be so afraid of losing the Christ we think we possess that we miss the real Christ who is waiting to find us. "Stand upon thy feet," said the voice of God to Ezekiel as he lay cowed and prostrate, "stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee."

The same thing is true of God's guidance. Many people long, at times, for the authority of a spiritual director. It is so comforting just to have our way made clear for us; to have decisions taken out of our hands. The trouble is that we never get anywhere by this kind of authoritative guidance, and, what is more to the point, we never become anything in the process. For, after all, what He cares about is not a life without blunders, but a life so lived that we shall develop our manhood and deepen our insight, and

so enter into fellowship with Him in a service in which His kingdom comes. God wants the man who is ready to use his own mind ; to think out, in the light of what he knows of the way of Christ and in dependence on His Spirit, what is the right thing to do. Is not this the reason why Christ made no rules and set up no regulations that had merely to be accepted and obeyed ? There is no big problem to which He gives a cut-and-dried solution. We go to Him for direction, let us say, on how to spend Sunday, and all we can find is a principle : “ The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath ”—a principle that settles nothing, but throws us back on ourselves to settle first the question what He means by “ man,” whether he is body or spirit, and then bids us decide in the light of the answer what method of spending Sunday will best further our true life. Or we go to Him for a decision as to how in certain circumstances we are to treat other people—those who have done us ill, for instance—and all He will say to us is that we must love them. But, what does He mean by “ love ” ? Thus again we are left to think out the perplexing way of love in some very difficult relationship. It is true we can get help, from the example of others, from that of Christ Himself most of all, and from thinking things out together, which is part of the purpose

of Christian fellowship. But any guidance from tradition, or from others, that would take from us all the burden of finding the way for ourselves is an evasion of the only means by which we can grow. And part of these means is the discipline of uncertainty. All progress, both moral and religious, has come through minds that were open to the light of the Spirit, and were ready to break the shackles of tradition to follow conscience. If either Luther or Wesley had submitted to authority and had sought a guidance that was cut and dried, there would have been no reformed church in Europe, and no religious revival in England. For they were walking an uncharted way. And no one, looking honestly at the results, can shut his eyes to the signs that the way they took was God's. We have to take risks. Christ's parable of the Good Shepherd does not imply that men are to become sheep. Mistakes may be made, but, even if they are, we shall have learned something. We shall have gained experience by our mistakes, which people who never make them never gain, and there are things that can be learned at no less a cost.

And even if we make mistakes, God is not limited in His purpose for us and for mankind by our mistakes. The love that so made us that we have to learn from our failures can triumph

over the failures through which we learn. If we are in perplexity, let us ask advice, by all means, from wise friends. Let us depend on God. But, withal, let us think out quietly for ourselves what we ought to do, and follow the guidance of the thing that appears to us to be right. We may have to walk an independent way ; to meet with troubles. But God will be with us in them, and the real thing in life is not that we should escape its trouble or its loneliness, but that we should in all things have His fellowship.

He that keeps faith with Me, will surely find  
My substance in the shadow of the deep,  
My spirit in the courage that men keep,  
Though all the stars burn out and heaven goes blind.

The fact is that God guides men by a light within, not by an external compulsion. Some people think of the Spirit of God as if the illumination of that Spirit were independent of their own faculties. How God dwells in man is a mystery ; but He comes into our life, not from beyond, but from within, or, rather, from " the beyond that is within." He comes through our own hearts open to His love, and through our own minds thinking about His way and focused at Jesus Christ. Through our own wills following the light we see, God comes and guides. The great thing is to be willing to take His way,

whatever it is, and to be ready to follow, and the light will shine.

A ready soldier here I stand,  
Primed for thy command.

This is the attitude of those to whom, and through whom, God speaks, and in whom He lives and moves. "Stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee."

## THE RESURRECTION OF FAITH

JOHN xx.—“ And Jesus said unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and said unto Him, Master.”

THIS is the story of a discovery that has meant more to the world than any other event in its history—the discovery that Jesus lives. It is the amazing fact that all the forces and powers that were revealed in Christ's earthly presence are still available for those who would possess them. That discovery revolutionised religion and opened up a new era of spiritual achievement. It is worth while noting the way in which it happened. The discovery was made by a woman, who was once a hopeless neurotic, but whose wounded mind Christ had healed and brought to peace. We owe all honour to her for this discovery : for she made it by a venture in faith and love. She made it as all the biggest discoveries have been made : by following the heart, the intuitions, rather than the reason ; and, like many other pioneers, she found far more than she dreamed when she went out to seek. Mr. Chesterton says of her and her companions : “ In varying ways they realised the new wonder : but even they hardly realised that the world had died in the night. What they



were looking at was the first day of a new creation with a new heaven and a new earth." Let us think first of how Mary made the discovery of the risen Christ, and then of what it meant, and means, in the region of personal religion.

First think of how she made the discovery. She had gone to the grave that morning with her young faith in ruins. Whatever ideas had begun to cluster around the person of Jesus for her and for the disciples, ideas of His Lordship and His kinship to God, Calvary had laid them in the dust. She just did not know what to think about Him now. With His death, life had lost its spring, its inspiration, its motive for going on. The very sun in the sky had set in a kind of hopeless night. She had lost her best friend. He was no more now than a memory. And all the hopes which He had quickened in her soul had faded like "the insubstantial pageant" of a dream. It was what we would call the loss of faith. The same kind of thing happens among ourselves. Sometimes it happens through a great sorrow. Someone is taken who was the centre of the joy and happiness of life, and the face of God seems hidden. There is nothing left to cling to. Sometimes it happens after a period of intellectual unsettlement, when we find that the

things which we believed and imagined to be solid rock begin to shake and tremble and go to pieces, and we are left with our beliefs a wreck. Sometimes it comes through a bitter experience—the betrayal by a friend, it may be ; or a shock which destroys our confidence in life. There are people who tell us that the war cost them their faith. Their trust in God was shattered by it and has never been built up again. Among all the casualties for which the war is responsible, how many of us include the casualties of the soul ? In all these cases, of course, it may be said that the faith that could thus be shattered was not very deep or very securely founded. The event that seems to have destroyed faith, you can be sure has not really done so ; rather is it merely the storm which has revealed the sandy foundation. No man ever loses a real faith through the shock of some experience. For in the very nature of faith in God there is the assurance that nothing in life, or death, or things present, or things to come, can separate us from His love. It is even the essence of faith that when a man is driven by the contradictions of life till he has his back to the wall, a quiet, deep, peace comes in his heart such as he may not have known before ; for he knows that that wall is God. To the man who has seen Jesus, and known

Him for what He is, there is nothing that can shift his anchorage. That is just the point here: Mary had not seen Jesus for what He really is. She had not seen Him in His glory. The real meaning and value of that Divine personality had not yet dawned upon her sight. For her, at this moment, He was the dearest friend she had ever known or could know—One who had saved her very soul. But Calvary had destroyed Him. He was at the mercy of death. He was among the mortals. His power had not stretched across the grave. That friendship belonged to time, not to eternity. She had not realised His infinite value, His indestructible love and friendship. And her faith withered; just when it had begun to grow, there had come this chill frost of death and blasted it. And all she could utter was this moaning cry, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."

But here is a thing to be noted. She did not yield to her despair. Nothing that had happened could stem her love or her gratitude. She was bound to Him by a bond of memory that death could not sever. So long as she lived, the sense of that experience, in which He had taken her distraught mind and set it free from passion and fear, was a golden jewel in her cup of life that all the acid of disappointment

could not dissolve away. She could not go back, as some have done, to plunge into the world again, and forget. Jesus had awakened in her the need for a fellowship which none but He could supply, and for which nothing that life might give could ever make up. In a sense, He had spoiled for her the things that men count dear. He had revealed that, without Himself, money and power and pleasure and everything of that nature were but tinsel, empty of meaning and beauty unless she could share them with Him and possess Him in them. The world with Him gone was like a beautiful landscape from which the sunshine had lifted, leaving it in an ashen shadow. The colour of life had faded, and nothing could restore it. That is always what happens when once you have met with Christ. Nothing can ever take His place again. If He has come to us, and then, again, we have lost the sense of His influence, there is always a sense of emptiness : there has passed away a glory from the earth.

There is something in the soul of the world which He has put there by coming into it that will always respond to Christ. There are needs that life creates which He alone can meet, wounds that He alone can heal. The further we go with Him the more we find He leads us into a world in which we cannot live without Him—a fact

which is part of the problem of civilisation to-day. We have gone so far in submitting to His Spirit that we must either go further or find it impossible to carry on at all. And nothing can finally stifle that hunger. In a large hall in Moscow, it is told, a lecturer was attacking what he called the obsolete faith of Christianity. This faith, he said, was the product of the capitalist class. Its nullity was easy to prove; it was now completely overthrown. The address seemed successful, and the speaker was so pleased with his efforts that he invited the audience to take part in discussion, with the condition that each speaker should occupy not more than five minutes. And a young man mounted the platform, a typical village priest, shy and awkward. The speaker looked at him scornfully. "Remember," he said, "only five minutes." "Certainly," said the young man; "I shall not take five minutes." And then he turned to the audience. "Brothers and sisters," he said, "Christ is risen." And as one man, the great audience replied with a shout. "Verily, He is risen." The effect was startling. All the speaker's eloquence was undone, and the meeting came abruptly to a close.

For oh! the Master is so fair,  
His smile so sweet to banished men,  
That they who meet Him unaware  
Can never turn to earth again.

How many people there are to-day for whom the face of Christ once shone, but now it has become veiled, or their backs are turned to Him ; and, though they have flung themselves into life and tried to find some lasting root of satisfaction, they know in their hearts that they have missed the best. The reason is that Christ has the power to awaken needs which He alone can supply. He has the power to quicken hopes and promises which He alone can fulfil. He brings us into a world of duty and challenge and opportunity in which He alone can enable us to live.

But Mary did not give up seeking. Though it was only a grave, as she imagined, that held Him now, she sought the grave. Though her love and loyalty could find no other expression than to anoint His body, weep beside His tomb, and nurse His memory—that she could do. She did not give way to her despair ; she came to the sepulchre. And she had her reward—as love and loyalty always have. For she heard at length a voice that said to her, “ Mary.” And, knowing in a flash that it was He, there quickly came the response, “ Master.”

There are those who tell us that the yearnings and cravings that set us seeking for a personal fellowship with God are all illusion ; that they come from ourselves ; and that all prayer feeds



on is our own emotions. In the south of France, at Avignon, there is an old bridge which ends in midstream. You pass over what remains, a firm good road, with promise of reaching the other side, and then you come to a chapel, and that is all. That is how some people think of religion ; a road that leads to the unseen, along which we travel, and then come to a place where we are left with our unanswered prayers and our unsatisfied longings spending themselves upon a void. In a story of Mr. H. G. Wells a distraught man who has found no real satisfaction in life goes to a doctor. The doctor tries various keys to his problem, makes various suggestions. " You have never," he asks, " turned to the idea of God ? " There is a pause. " I can't believe in a God."—" But this loneliness, this craving for companionship ? "—" We have all been through that," says the other ; " we have all in our time lain very still in the darkness with our souls crying out for the fellowship with God, demanding some sign, some personal response. The faintest feeling of assurance would have satisfied us."—" And you have never had any response ? "—" It faded : it always does."—" I wonder," Wells goes on, " how many people there are nowadays who have passed through this experience of ineffectual invocation, this appeal to the fading shadow of the vanished God.

I can believe that over all things there is righteousness, but righteousness is not mercy, nor comfort, nor friendliness, nor any of such dear and intimate things."

That is a very common kind of experience. But is it that for which we are looking? Are we looking for some kind of emotion? Or are we looking, as we ought to look, for some clear word of duty? for some constraint of conscience? for some light upon the way of life? for some sense of the glory of Jesus to touch our souls? The experience of Mary is the experience of thousands. It is the sense of having in Christ a personal friend—the assurance in Him of a love that cares and understands—the conviction, that deepens with every fresh response of faith and duty, that God has to do with us, and that we have to do with Him, and that somehow His hand is on the tiller of our life. Mary found Jesus the personal Saviour, living, radiant, abiding for ever. And why? *Because He was seeking her.* That is the real explanation of our longings. It is God who is seeking us. These prayers are all of His inspiration. These yearnings are all of His approaching love. These aspirations are all of His kindling. Perhaps we seek too anxiously. We strive and strain in our seeking. We do not wait enough. For God oftenest finds us when we are quiet

enough to be found, when we are still enough and open enough to hear His voice. It may be that, like Paul, we need to be brought to a point of despair in our seeking—where we can do nothing but let His light shine in. It may be we are not soft enough, not willing enough to take His way. Salvation is of Him, not of us ; it is of His grace, not of our deserving ; it is of His gift, not of our achieving. We can be sure He is seeking us more than we are seeking Him. That was what Mary found when she was quiet enough to listen and had ceased from the torrent of her own entreaties. She found that in one whom she supposed to be the gardener, a commonplace figure, *He* had been with her all the while.

## II

Now, let us go on to ask what this discovery means in the region of personal religion. It is vital for Christianity. The Resurrection is the key to the Book of Acts. It is the explanation of all the experience of those who have entered into the secret of Jesus. For Christianity is the religion of a personal contact with God through Jesus Christ.

This discovery meant two things to Mary. In the first place it meant that death made no difference to her intimate friendship with Jesus.

The gulf was bridged. His spirit had the power of immediate contact with hers. *Jesus lives.* Time and space, which limit our intercourse with one another, have no power to limit our vital contact with Christ. That is the simplest way to put it. No one in his sane senses would ever take up the position that in the case of our friends death makes no difference. It makes an appalling difference. There is a great gulf fixed—however often to some there may come moments when they feel that those they love are near. And no attempts to bridge this gulf have brought any assured success. Spiritualism is trying to do it, and claims that it has been successful. If it could be so, no one would essay to discount the claim. But the evidence is not enough to bring assurance of its success, and the messages which are said to have come from the other side are not sensible enough, nor weighty enough, nor inspiring enough, to encourage the attempt. Indeed, on the highest grounds it may be doubted whether success in that direction is a possibility: whether, with that world in which the material vehicle of the spirit is no longer the medium of our contacts, we can expect any other communication than in those deeper regions where spirit with spirit can meet. Death makes an appalling difference to our human friendships. But the claim of the New

Testament, and the message of the Resurrection, is that it is otherwise with Jesus. He lives, and in His living personality He has access to our souls. Space and time and circumstances cannot limit His presence.

Thomas Hardy did not believe in this kind of immortality for anyone. For him, the only immortality is that by which people live in the memories and in the love of those they leave behind. He has two pathetic poems on the subject. In one he describes the appeal which a woman who is dead makes to one she loves. Her shade, whatever that may be, calls to him.

In you resides my single power  
Of sweet continuance here.  
On your fidelity I count  
Through many a coming year.

He makes answer that he will live for her sake. And then the poem ends on this note of grief and hopelessness—

But : grows my grief. When I surcease,  
Through whom alone lives she,  
Her spirit ends its living lease,  
Never again to be.

That was his conception of a future life. We live a shadowy existence so long as people remember us and keep in their hearts some love for us like the afterglow of the setting sun ;

and then we die, because we are really dead already ! But does any such conception as that explain the power of Jesus ? Does memory alone explain His influence on men and women, generation after generation ? Does it explain how in hearts where He was forgotten, or had hardly been known, there has awakened a love, a loyalty, a likeness to His Spirit, making men and women new, enabling them to do things and face things which seemed utterly beyond them ; in many cases, even, enabling them to alter the course of history and bring a dead and corrupt world back to life and purity. Does memory explain the thousands upon thousands who claim that in their hearts, in some language that was clearer than speech, they have heard Him call them by name, and have been compelled to turn round about from some way of sin or despair or doubt, and acknowledge Him " Master " ? The fact is, that in His case, death has made no difference to His intimate power with men, to the reality of His friendship. We know it when we really sit down to that story and think of Him. We feel that it makes no difference to His power to judge us. That Man on the Cross throws a very startling light into our souls—a light so real that there are people who dare not think about Him at all. And He challenges us ; He is challenging us in



this generation. His message is valid for to-day. One by one, His startling ideas as to the way in which nations ought to live and men ought to treat their fellows, are finding their way into our legislation, our industrial management, our international settlements. There is a curious immediacy about the words of Jesus, as if they were spoken straight into our hearts. Just sit down with the thought of Jesus in your mind and run over all you know about Him. Think of His life ; His way with people ; His words, so far as you can remember them, and see if they do not get you. Or take the New Testament and read it quietly, letting the light of it into your mind, and see if, before very long, you do not find yourself taken into a world in which He and you are standing together, while He says to you, " Mary " or " Thomas," or " John " or " David."

### III

For another thing leaps out of this story. *He has to do with us each one individually.* God in Jesus does not speak to men like a political leader addressing the country. He has a message for each of us. A writer tells how he and a friend were walking up a great street in New York on an election night. His friend turned

to him suddenly and said, "All these people make me feel that I amount to nothing. What is one fellow in a great mass?" "Yes," replied the other, "I suppose one would feel that if he did not know that when a man meets God he always meets Him alone. We are never lost in the crowd with Him." That is what Jesus made men feel. When He came down the Jericho road that day He made Zaccheus feel that his home was the goal of His journey. When He met for the first time a woman who had fallen, a man who had sinned, one look from His eyes was enough to make them feel that it was for them He had come that way. There is a line in the *Dies Iræ* that always brought tears to the eyes of Samuel Johnson as it called up the picture of Christ by the well-side :

Seeking me, Thou sat'st there weary.

It is the same to-day. The centuries vanish in mist when we stand before the gaze of these penetrating eyes. It is the power of love, which is always personal. He knows us each one, and makes us feel that He knows us. There is a place in God's thought which each one of us has, and no other can take it. For, as the writer to the Hebrews says, there is none who is not manifest in His sight, none who is not

present to the infinite loving consciousness of God. Jesus makes us feel that.

He knows us one by one. He knows *you*, with your big temptation, who live in a kind of despair. And He calls you by name. He is with you in that fight. And He knows *you* who are overshadowed by some big trouble looming ahead ; He calls you, too, by name, assuring you that He is with you there and that with Him there is nothing you need be afraid to meet. And He sees *you* also whose fears for other people make you anxious and drain your strength like a secret disease : He calls you by name, calls you into a trust in Him that will find God's world all good. And He sees *you*, too, who have a bad conscience : He knows how you have brought trouble and unhappiness on others and on yourself, and that you are not worthy of a tenth of the love and goodness lavished upon you. He calls you to begin again with Him. And He knows *you* also for whom the world seems to have no use, for whom no one cares. He calls you by your name. And His message to you is that you are infinitely worth while to Him—that your loss is His loss, and that your love is part of His heaven.

He calls each one of us into His world—that higher world in which He lives victoriously ; from which sin and death could not shut Him

out ; that world in which love is the law of life, and service is the key to happiness ; where to do the right, seek the truth, and think for others as for ourselves, is the hallmark of the citizen ; that world which is both here and yonder, and is the Father's house. His friendship is the door into that higher world for which God made us. Let no lurking doubt or scepticism keep us out of it. And if we feel afraid of the difficulty or the cost or the weakness of our will, listen to His words : " All power is given unto Me in heaven, and in earth, and *I am with you alway.*"

## REDEMPTION THROUGH FELLOWSHIP

LUKE xv.—“What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not go into the wilderness and seek for that which has gone astray, until he find it.”

THE three parables in this chapter are all illustrations of one saying of Jesus, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” They are all pictures lighting up that passion in His heart.

The key to them all is in the word “lost.” The very word has a tragic sound. There is no more pathetic figure than a little child lost in a great city, or a man lost in a desert. In general, a thing is lost when it is out of relationship with that to which it belongs; a relationship in which alone it can find its true life. And two things happen when a thing is lost. That thing is itself defective. A diamond in the gutter may be worth much, but not so long as it is in the gutter. Its true value is only discovered when it is restored to its place in the jewel to which it belongs. It is the same, of course, with the lost people of whom Christ is thinking. Personality is incomplete, undeveloped, unsatisfied, till the persons are brought into relation with the world to which

they belong. Only in our proper environment do we develop our true selves. But, also, the world from which things are lost is defective till they are restored. A brooch without its diamond looks a pitiful thing ; and it is a poverty-stricken garden where the plants which have withered and died are left unreplaced. Jesus came to find us, to restore us to the place to which we belong in God's love and in a real world. We belong to it not only for our own sake but for the sake of that world.

If we examine these three stories carefully, we will find that they each suggest a different way in which people are lost. Such was His genius, His insight into human nature, that Christ realised that people are lost in various ways, and if these parables are studied they illustrate needs in human life and defects by which people get out of touch with God ; needs and defects which Christ can meet. Let us think in this study of the first, the case of the sheep which had gone astray. " What man of you," said Jesus, " having a hundred sheep, if one of them be gone astray, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and seek after that which has gone astray, until he find it ? "



## I

We must not, of course, carry the meaning of details in a parable beyond the point which Christ was trying to make clear, but here is a picture of a sheep whose trouble came from the fact that it was separated from the flock, which was its true environment. We do not know how the separation came about. It may have had more initiative than the rest, more individuality, as we would say. It was, perhaps, more concerned with finding the best kind of pasture, than keeping in touch with the flock and the shepherd. Further and further it wandered alone, till it lost its way, met with some accident, was caught in a thicket, or stranded on some precipice. There it begins to feel its solitude; panic takes possession of it; it runs this way and that, looking for companions; and, if it be not found, it will probably perish in the desert or be captured by some prowling beast. In any case it will be neither safe, nor happy, nor strong, until it is restored to the flock. Is it straining the picture's meaning too much to see in it the case of the man who is out of touch with his fellows, or out of that touch with them in which we were meant to live; who is therefore lost, his nature unsatisfied, his personality undeveloped?

The most familiar thing in the world is the solitude of the soul. There is, of course, a solitude that belongs to all of us. As Amiel says, "We suffer alone, we sin alone, we die alone." There is a depth in us that no other can fully penetrate, no other but God. There are solitudes into which no other can enter. There are secrets we cannot share, because we cannot communicate them: "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." Or there is the loneliness of the man who is ahead of his time—the pioneer in truth or conscience. No one was so lonely as Jesus. His loneliness at the end was only the reflex of the loneliness in which He had lived all His days. And, again, there is the solitude of independence, a solitude which is essential to our life. In a sense we must all stand alone and walk alone, if we are to be ourselves. There are times when the light is clear to us, and we must follow it by ourselves. When Paul was once clear in his own mind about the path, he asked counsel of no one. "Immediately," he says, "I conferred not with flesh and blood." But no such solitudes as these need put us out of touch with our fellows, though they may put them out of touch with us. The more Christ walked in the solitude of His own communion with God, the more closely He was in touch with men. None was so lonely as He, and yet none was

so deeply at one with them, their pain and sin as much His own as the beating of His own heart.

But there is a solitude which isolates. It drives us apart from our fellows in ways that are wrong ; we get out of sympathy with those at home, or with the people in the church to which we belong. The root of it is that we have no real interest in them ; we may even come to have a certain contempt for them. There are people in some families who, as a writer says, " live in a wasteful atmosphere of custom, kiss one another with secret indifference, move about in an armour of egotism, drunk with self-gazing, unmoved by the accidents that befall their closest friends, in dread of all appeals that might interrupt their long communion with their own desires." In any case they think themselves sufficient to themselves, dwelling apart in the loneliness of the self-centred life. Would not Jesus say of people like these that they are like the sheep which had gone astray ; that until, somehow, contact is restored, and they are brought back to a living interest in others, they are as surely lost as the sheep which was stranded on the mountain ?

This isolation may happen in various ways. It may come about through pride ; we have more gifts than other people, and our tastes are, as we

suppose, superior to theirs. Insensibly we begin to criticise them ; to look down upon them ; to take a certain pride that we are not as other men are, and even to rejoice in the fact that we do not like them and they do not like us. This isolation, again, may come through our individuality. We want to be ourselves, which is perfectly right ; we want to be free from conventions in which we feel imprisoned, to think out our own way. We want to find a religion of our own, and perhaps in finding it we discover that we cannot hold exactly what others hold, or look at things in the same way. All that may be perfectly right. There is a period in the growth of young people when they are up against their elders, just because at that stage it is right for them to assert their individuality. And the parents' apron-strings may sometimes be broken in ways that seem ruthless. But we may never emerge from that stage of rebellion ; it may harden into an attitude of resentment and aloofness. With some young people it is so. They never grow beyond the stage of rebellion which is the first stage to a right self-assertion. They think contemptuously of people who have other views, or who seem tied to conventions from which they are emancipated ; and, bit by bit, the chasm deepens and widens, until they are isolated in a solitude which is merely pride

and stupidity. It is a case of arrested development. The point is that, if we have failed to use our independence for the remaking of friendship at a deeper level, we have failed in love. We have got lost, and the tragic thing may be that we do not know it.

Or it is possible that isolation may come through sin. Sin is always isolating, because the true nature of it is selfishness. Sin is the anti-social thing ; it is really rebellion against the spirit of the whole. There is hardly any need to illustrate this. In how many broken homes is not this the root of the trouble ? All sin isolates. Coleridge devoted a whole great poem to make this clear—the quaint story of the Ancient Mariner. In an act of senseless cruelty he had killed the albatross which had become the ship's friend, and afterwards, the ship was becalmed, and his comrades died, and he was left alone :

Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide, wide sea !  
So lonely it was, that God Himself  
Scarce seemed there to be.

I looked to heaven and tried to pray,  
But e'er ever a prayer had gushed,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust.

The essence of sin is to seek for something for oneself, apart from the good of others ; to satisfy

our own impulses and desires, apart from the good of the community. It is the assertion of oneself in ambition or passion or appetite. And, therefore, all sin isolates ; it dries up the love we have for our fellows, and tends to empty them of value for us. It puts us out of sympathy with them ; and, therefore, to follow the pathway of selfishness is to go astray, like the sheep that sought the good pasture for itself and got lost.

On the other hand, there is an isolation in which we are driven in on ourselves through the fault of others, or of circumstances. George Eliot describes such a case in the story of Silas Marner. In the little narrow religious circle to which he belonged he was falsely accused of stealing a bag of money, and the evidence seemed conclusive. He was dismissed from church membership. The girl to whom he was engaged to be married broke off the engagement. Everyone was against him. The result was that he was driven for solace to his work as a weaver. But now the money, for which he used to work because he found a purpose for it beyond itself, became an end in itself. He removed to a village among strangers ; his one effort to find a bridge of fellowship ended disastrously. His whole soul was frosted with suspicion and enmity. The fountains of human trust were



dried up within him, and he relapsed into a state of intense loneliness and self-absorption in which the gathering of money was his only interest in life. Many people have an experience akin to that—perhaps more than we realise. The timid shoots of trust in their fellows which they put out with hesitation are repulsed; they find nothing to which they can cling, and the end is like that of a vine which has no supports on which it can rise—a huddled heap of ineffective longings, falling back on itself.

## II

Now the real truth is that there is no full development of our true nature apart from the love of others, and a real interest in them; for the deepest part of our nature is our capacity to love. The man who is deficient in love is defective in life. We may be doing what appears to be the finest service, or filling the highest position, and yet, if there is between us and others a barrier of pride or contempt or indifference, we are undeveloped; our personality is defective. There is but one real poverty, as a writer says, and it is poverty of loving. We may have even what are called social sympathies. We may love mankind in the mass, we may subscribe to philanthropic movements, and yet

we may have no real interest in people, no real love for them. Some people will tell you frankly that they love Humanity—with a capital letter—but when it comes to loving the man who lives next door, or sits in the same pew at church, they find it impossible.

This sympathy with others is the most important quality in our nature. Without it, our deepest instincts are unsatisfied. That is the real secret of many restless and empty lives, and people do not know it. They try in various ways to find a substitute for it. They develop a violent affection for a pet dog or some other animal. Or they find in ambition a substitute for the love of people, or, like Silas Marner, in money. "Every man's work, pursued steadily," says George Eliot, "tends in this way to become an end in itself, and so to bridge over the loveless chasms of his life." Sometimes they seek satisfaction for their empty hearts in a form of mystical religion: they develop a fondness for a highly picturesque ritual, or for hymns of an emotional or sentimental type. Part of the attraction which certain forms of worship hold for some is that they satisfy a nature which ought to be finding its real interest in the love of people. Perhaps we may ask what else religion is for, if not to give this satisfaction. "Religion," says

Professor Whitehead, "is what a man does with his solitariness." But everything is wrong when this satisfaction isolates ; when it shuts people up, and feeds their own emotional life, without leading it out to blossom into a healthy interest and love of others. It is then no better than a drug that induces a temporary sense of health.

And without this sympathy we are defective in social life. We cannot pull with others ; we cannot rightly help others because we cannot really understand them or identify ourselves with them in their need. For the real help for which many people are starving is not our gifts, but the love that should go through the gifts and ought to lie behind them. "When I have attempted to give myself to others by services," says Emerson, "it is an intellectual trick. They eat your service like apples and leave you out ; but love them, and they feel you and delight in you all the time." It is this want of sympathy that divides the world by class bitterness and race contempt ; and, whatever artifice we may use to reach unity and peace, nothing will ever break down these invisible barriers, except that which softens our hearts, and reveals us to each other as the children of God and brothers in the Father's world.

And, worst of all, and saddest of all, without this love there is no true sense of God in our life, and no real touch with Him. We imagine that we can love Him apart from the love of others. What interest would we have had in Christ, if He had loved God but had had no real love for men? Was it not His love for them that drew men to Him, and draws them still? The truth is, we cannot give our love to God in the abstract, any more than we can give our love to an idea. We can only love God truly, as He meets us among the things we know ; in the love of those who need us, and whose lives are empty for want of what we can give. It is just *there* that God waits to meet us, and the one thing needed to make religion real for some people is an experience that will thaw their indifference and awaken, in their ice-bound hearts, an interest in others apart from their class or their station. Without that they are lost, as a sheep which has gone astray.

### III

How is this need to be met? Only Christ can meet it. Sometimes it is through the Church's fellowship that He breaks into the lonely heart. It is part of the Church's business to recover those who are estranged from their  
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fellows. In the case of those whom society has driven in on themselves this is often the only way. Many people need to lose the fear of men, of their harshness and cruelty, which some sad experience has burned into their souls. And the Church's task is to give to the social outcast the feel of home and the sense of a family life. Here lies one of her greatest defects to-day—and it is a reason why people turn from her with indifference. They are seeking a place in which they can recover their souls from the dreadful sense that they are lost from any vital personal care in which their life would count and they are not finding it. It is through the fellowship of those who believe in love, because it is the power through which their own lives have been caught up from the swirl of meaningless things, that Christ gets through. There is a legend of how the soul of Judas Iscariot fled through the void and passed from abyss to abyss, till at last remorse yielded to grief. And a great light shone, and he looked in through the open windows of heaven and saw His brethren, the Apostles, standing about a table laden with bread and with wine. Then came One who took him by the hand and drew him inside to where there was an empty place—his own. “We have waited for thee,” said the Master. “My guests could not sit down to

supper till thou wast here." The Church must recover that sense of incompleteness, that refusal to be satisfied with the bounty of Christ, till the people who are lost are brought in.

And when they come, by whatever road, into touch with Christ, how does He meet their need? How does He deal with the hardness, the self-absorption?

In the first place, if we are open to Him, He shows us what we are; He holds up a mirror to the pride or the contempt which has kept back our affection; He destroys that false idea of ourselves which has buttressed our superiority. For what are *we* in the blazing light of His love and unselfishness? What is all we have been, or done, in that comparison? As we think of Him, sooner or later it comes to us that it was just this self-assertion of men that put Him on a cross, and which works out still in the crucifixion of humanity. When pride is broken, there is room for us to see others. The windows are unscreened; we are free to realise how much these others are worth to Him. It comes home to us that we are all in the same boat on a very stormy ocean, and the little best we can do is to help our fellow-passengers.

And then, as we see the need of other folk, a love for them, an interest in them, awakens. We realise that in that need Christ comes and



asks for our love and we are drawn out, not in patronage, but in lowly service that makes us one with Him.

I come in little things, saith the Lord ;  
My strong wings I do forsake,  
Life's highway of humanity to take,  
In beggar's part about your gate.  
I shall not cease to plead  
As man with man,  
Till by such art, I do achieve  
My immortal plan,  
Past the low lintels of the human heart.

That is not fancy, it is literal truth. "I saw the Son of Man to-day," says the old stone-breaker in Mr. Irvine's little book about his mother, and then the old man goes on to tell how there came to him the village Magdalen, soiled with sin, telling him she was hungry. His heart melted in pity, and he told her to go a distance away until he had finished his meal, and he would make a sign to her and she could come and find what was left. And then his heart smote him. Welcome the Son of Man, and "give Him the leavings"? It would not do. So he called her again, and bade her come when the meal was ready, and take it first; and there broke in his heart such a radiance, that he knew he had been visited by Christ. For it was he himself whose heart was cold and proud and scornful; he had been the sheep that was astray, and the Shepherd had come to him in his isolation, and

REDEMPTION THROUGH FELLOWSHIP 101  
through another's need had led him back to fellowship and to life.

That is what Jesus can do for us. He can break down the walls that isolate ; the walls that pride or selfishness or resentment have made. He can break these down till we can see others in reality, not as things, or shadows, but as men and women, and in their way of need *He* comes to us, till the very contact with others becomes fellowship with Him. It is that experience that can turn the world from being a jungle into a home. More than anything else it is what many people need to-day. How do we feel towards others ? How do we look upon them ? Perhaps that is the door at which Christ stands knocking, waiting until it opens ; for until it opens, however richly furnished it may be, the house is a prison. But when that door of sympathy opens, it will let us out into a world of freedom and joy, and we will hear the voice of Him who seeks us all, to lead us into the love of men, which is the love of God, saying, " Rejoice with Me, for I have found that which was lost."

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## THE MEN GOD CAN USE

JUDGES vii.—“ And God said to Gideon, By the three hundred men will I save you. Let all the rest go every man to his own place.”

LUKE ix.—“ No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

**H**ERE is a story that, when we are depressed, has the power to put iron into our blood and hope into our hearts.

The nation had come to a very bad pass. They were living under the heel of their heathen neighbours. The pure religion which they had brought with them across the desert, or, rather, by which they had been brought, had nearly vanished in a welter of superstition. In place of their God—the God of the ten commandments—they had accepted the worship of Baal, the god of lust and of every passion of the blood. And, with their religion gone, the moral fibre of the nation had rotted. If anyone imagines for a moment that its religion does not matter to a nation, he has only to read the book of Judges and he will learn that a real religion is the only true backbone of national and individual character. The nation that puts God out of its life begins to lose before very long its place in history. The roots of national virility find their

sap and nourishment in the soil of a living faith. We may carry on for a while by the reflected light of a faith that is dead, but the day comes when that light fails. We may go on for a while, as some people do, by the secret inspiration of the faith of our fathers, like a slip-carriage that moves for a space by the momentum of the train from which it has been loosed; but in time, like the slip-carriage, we will come to a standstill and get side-tracked. It always happens so. And so it happened here. But there was one man whose spirit began to awake. Gideon determined to rally his fellow-countrymen, and the first thing he did was to gather a little band of them to tear down the emblems of Baal worship and set up again the worship of God. It was taking his life in his hands, but it had its effect. The sleeping conscience of the nation was roused; at his call thirty thousand men flocked to the standard. But now comes the interesting point. Gideon had the soul of a leader because he had a soul that was led by God, and he realised that his army was too big. He saw that all sorts of motives had brought these men around him—some because it was popular, some because it was exciting, some because they did not like to be left out of the crowd. It was not really an army—it was a mob. So he took means to test them, to weed out the unfit, and

when the test was over only three hundred remained. Any leader might have been daunted by such a result. What could he do with this little group against such hordes of heathen? But, again, the inner voice spoke to him, "By these three hundred will I save the nation—let the rest go home." And these three hundred went out, and the enemy surrendered to them almost without a blow.

## I

This is a great story for a time of discouragement. There are two facts that face us to-day with appalling clearness. The one is the gigantic nature of the Church's present task. It is a task as big and difficult in its way as was Gideon's in his. And we are waking up to the fact. That we are recognising this, and that this is the meaning of our Christian discipleship, is an element of hope. Jesus came to lead people into a crusade. Some people get into the way of thinking that the Church is an institution for helping them to reach and to keep up a certain standard of goodness. With its ordered worship, it becomes a place of kindly shelter for their souls from the rough edge of life. They are content if they find help in it or a measure of comfort and hope. It is a sort of ship in which

they take passage that they may cross, more or less safely, the ocean of life. But that was never Christ's view of it. "Come unto Me," He said to the people, "and ye shall find rest to your souls"; but He never concealed the fact that He meant to lead them somewhere. All the time He was shaping them into an army to carry the flag of the faith into all sorts of unhealthy places. He gathered them in, that He might send them out; and they very soon discovered the fact—although, when they found what He was after, only about a dozen stayed to see it through. When we read the New Testament letters, we find ourselves in an atmosphere of war. Many of these letters read exactly like the letters sent by some general to the lads in the trenches. "Take your share of hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," writes Paul. "Put on the whole armour of God," he writes again. "For we fight not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with spiritual wickedness in high places." That was the spirit of the Church when it was starting out. And its great days have always returned when the Church recovered this militant note—this note of a high crusade. It looks as if this were about to happen to-day. We have come to see that if we do not challenge the world with our faith the world is going to attempt the old process of



quietly freezing the Church to death. So we are seeing our task with new eyes. And what a task it is. In the name of Christ we are to carry the message and spirit of the gospel into the world. We are to meet the foe of the spirit of man in every field. We have got to take the spirit of the Kingdom into our homes, our markets, our council chambers. We have to make our stand against the greed and the selfishness and the mere pleasure-seeking of the world, and permeate it with the Spirit of Christ till He reigns. What a task it is ! When we look at it we are appalled.

But a second thing becomes also vividly clear. The weakness of the Church is not so much its poverty of numbers ; it is the fewness of those who are really keen, who mean business. Some statistician says that there are over 576,000,000 Christians in the world, but when one looks around he has his hours of depression wondering where they all live. The real truth is that there are but few who really mean their Christianity, few who are carried by it instead of carrying it.

## II

It is for such hours of depression that this story was recorded and preserved, that it might put iron into the blood.

For this is its message—that it is not quantity, but quality, that counts. Not numbers, but spirit. Not the size of the army, but the souls of the men. And the story repeats itself endlessly. The great battles of faith in history have been won by the few against the many. Think of the Maccabees, for instance, the little band of Jews who stood up to the great world-power of their day when that power threatened to swamp their religion and put out their light. They were only a handful against a disciplined multitude, but what men they were. As we read in the 11th of Hebrews, “They were stoned, they were sawn asunder; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy.” And think of the men who won liberty for England in the days of Cromwell. “I wanted such men as had the fear of God in them,” he said, “men who made some conscience of all they did.” And Cromwell’s men were welded into the “Ironsides,” who carried everything before them. And think of the men in Wesley’s day, who faced open hotbeds of vice and superstition for God, and carried the spirit of the Kingdom up and down the land, till a new epoch began in English history. “Give me,” he cried, “a hundred men who fear nothing but sin and love nothing but God, and I will shake the

✓ gates of hell." And think, too, of the attack on the slave trade of America. It started with men like John Woolman, that obscure member of the Society of Friends. He met with a little group and persuaded them that slavery was wrong. Then he and three others were sent out to bring the light to those of their brethren who were rich and powerful. Opposition and scorn met them, but they persisted, and through their efforts the mighty system was sapped in its secret foundations. And what kind of a man was Woolman? "He was," says his biographer, "a man with a single soul, whose conscience dictated all he did." ✓ It is quality, not numbers, that counts in the tasks of the Kingdom. It is the kind of men and women we are, that matters most; not the size of our group, but the force of our spirit. "By these three hundred men," said God to Gideon, "will I save."

The reason, of course, is that it is God who works, not we. The mistake we often make is to depend on numbers. That is why they may sometimes have to be reduced, and why it is possible that the Church may not recover her power till she is even smaller than she is—and every other reason for belonging to her, except the right one, is gone. That was clear to Gideon. He wanted the number reduced, lest, having won, they should take the credit to themselves.

But the real danger of numbers is that we might depend on numbers instead of depending on God. For it is God who works. There is no other explanation. Whittier the poet, in his appreciation of Woolman, begins by saying this, "Nothing is more difficult of explanation by those who look upon the surface, than the strength of moral influence often exerted by humble and uneventful lives. Some great reform which shakes the world takes place before our eyes, some mighty change for which the ages have been waiting; and when we trace the secret we are often surprised to find the initial link in the chain of causes, to be some humble individual the Divine commission of whose life was hardly understood by his contemporaries, not even by himself. The little one has become ✓ a thousand. And the only explanation is that through the humble instrument, the Divine ✓ power was manifested." That is the real secret ✓ of all great changes, of all moral revolutions, of all the leaps of progress that take this world higher into the light. It is God at work in per- *Here* sonalities who are open to Him. His power is released in people who are free to love, free to serve, free to follow the light, free to obey the highest. Our personalities are nothing save as they are a torch for God's kindling, a fire for His flame. We are, what we are worth to God for

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His purposes. Without that Spirit set free in our lives and living, we are but a lamp without a light, a shell which is empty, however cultured or prosperous or popular. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" said Paul. This is the true definition of personality. We rise in the scale of manhood or womanhood as we become His agents. We live in the measure in which He is able to live in us. We grow into power and grace and joy as we become the living medium of His truth, as our insight becomes clearer, our hearts become warmer, our characters increasingly a radiating centre for Jesus Christ. These three hundred men out of all that thirty thousand were the real men of the nation, because they were free for God's leading. "And by these three hundred men," said God, "I will save you."

### III

Now, what was the quality of manhood for which Gideon was looking, and for which he devised his tests? The first was fearlessness. He wanted men who were delivered from fear. So he told them a few things about the difficulties in front of them, just enough to scare those who could be frightened. And twenty thousand of them went home. But he wanted also whole-hearted men, men who would put every

ounce of themselves into their task, who would not be thinking half the time of their own comfort and be mainly concerned with food and drink. So he led his ten thousand running across a stream. They were all thirsty and all began to drink, but they took different methods to slake their thirst. One lot flung themselves down on their knees and buried their faces in the water, as if they were ready to stop there for ever. They forgot the enemy for the moment, forgot everything except that they were thirsty. Had the enemy come on them at that moment, they would have been at their mercy. The others, the three hundred, bent down as they ran, and caught up the water in their hands as they crossed. The first thing in their minds was not the water nor their thirst, but the foe in front. They were whole-hearted fellows, those three hundred, all out to beat the foe and save their nation. By these three hundred, delivered from fear and half-heartedness of purpose, the nation would be saved.

That was a touch of real genius in Gideon, the genius of leadership. Garibaldi devised the same test. When he went out of Rome after holding the city for months on his first campaign, he made his great appeal for men who were worth while. "Soldiers," he cried as he stood



at the city gate, "I offer you no food, no rations, no uniforms. I offer you hardship, difficulty, hunger, thirst, and forced marches. Let those who love Italy better than anything else, come and follow me." And there swarmed after him the men who finally became the backbone of his heroic thousand. And Jesus took the same line. He saw that it was just these two things that spoil the manhood which God can use, fear and the clutch of self-indulgence. It is these two things that keep some people back from Christianity in the first place. They may say to themselves it is something else. They may call it doubt or superior intelligence or use some other camouflage; but get right down to the roots, and it is often one or other of these two things. Many people would follow Christ to-morrow but for their fears. They are afraid of being unpopular, afraid of having to make changes, afraid of where this thing is going to lead them. They are afraid of being different from the crowd among whom they move. Or there is the other thing. They are fond of having an easy time. They like their comforts. They are bound to the world's view of success. They are the slaves of wrong values—the greed for money, the love of power, the spirit that puts self first, that spirit which is our modern form of Baal worship. And when Christ calls

to them in the depth of their souls, they are not free. They are tied—still tied to the things they love, to their own views of life, to their own prejudices : or paralysed by fear. ✓✓✓

③ It is the same with many who profess Him. They will go a certain length, but they will not go all the way. They see the tasks ahead, but they are afraid of things they might have to face or endure. Or they are bound to their own comforts or luxuries. The spirit of the world has not been cast out. "Demas hath forsaken me," said Paul, "having loved this present world." And some there are who, because these things are secretly holding their hearts, cannot think straight about the Christian way. It is said that the most dangerous spot for ships off the coast of America is a region near Cape Hatteras, where a quicksand has swallowed up many steel ships, with the result that when vessels approach that region the compass by which they steer is deflected and cannot give them the true direction. Are there not people like that, whose conscience is deflected by sunken things in their own hearts, wrong allegiances of which they are partly unconscious, and they are unable to respond to the guidance of Christ amid our modern confusions. They are not really free to do honest thinking.

Nicodemus would have followed Christ, and  
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so would the rich man in whose grave He was buried; but for fear of the Jews they held back till He was dead, and then it came to them like a sword-thrust that they had helped to crucify Him, and by that sword-thrust their bonds were cut. Jesus had his tests. "Behold, I send you forth," He said, "as sheep among wolves." And when one came and said, "Master, I will follow Thee, but I must first go and say good-bye to those at home," Jesus answered, "But I have no home; foxes have holes, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." He was sounding the depths of their loyalty. He wanted to test whether they had a vision of Him, a sense of His value, that was big enough to stand any strain, big enough to risk any loss, big enough to face anything. He wanted, in fact, to know if they had seen that in Him for which they were willing to die. For no man has really seen Jesus or had the great experience without knowing that this is something for which he would be willing to give up even life itself.

One might have thought that Christ would have made it easy for He saw that as He spoke His followers began to dwindle away. He knew though that, even if they left Him thus, of their own free will many of them would come back. They would never be able to forget Him!

Those who have once seen Christ can never forget Him. They can never find any real peace again, away from Him. They may deny Him, and reject Him, but their very denials and protests mean that somewhere, as in the case of Paul, He is reaching their inmost hearts. ✓ All their arguments against religion are merely ✓ a way of holding the door against a secret con- ✓ viction which they are unwilling to admit. But ✓ some day they will come back.

The result of that testing of Jesus was that He had only a dozen men and a few women left when all was done. But they were people unafraid. They had lost "the fear of being unpopular, the fear of being hurt, the fear of being poor." And, with that little group, Christ knew that God could finally redeem His world. Therefore, He died with a shout of triumph on His lips. "Be of good cheer," He said, when they stood together facing Calvary and utter defeat, "I have overcome the world."

#### IV

But what of the rest? Gideon sent them home. Is that all? It might be, for them; though one imagines they would sit down and think of themselves with a shame that would make new men of them. But it is not all that

Jesus does, for His Gospel is that He can deliver from fear. He does not ask for perfect men. He knows that He can create them. Not all at once, but bit by bit, as in the case of the disciples. His real demand was just that they should be willing to be remade. He wants people who, with all their weakness and fear, are willing to put themselves into His hands ; He can do the rest. The disciples at first were afraid ; they were tied to some extent to wrong values. They could not believe in any victory of God that could enable them to face suffering and be at peace in it. They ran away at the crucifixion. But they were ready for Christ to remake them, and when they stayed in His company, He took the fear out of them and He took the self-love out of them and He changed their whole world so that when they stood before the authorities they amazed them —“ They saw the boldness of Peter and John, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.”

Christ can thus remake the men and women who put themselves into His hands. He can take the fear out of our hearts, He can win our whole-hearted allegiance, He can break the bonds that bind us to ease and comfort and possessions. How does He do it? He shows us, for one thing, that there is nothing to be

afraid of. For He fills the world with His love, a love which we know we need never lose, which meets us in everything, even in loss and pain. "Perfect love casteth out fear," says John. This is all God's world, after all, and He seeks us through every bit of its experience. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or hardship or death? Nay, in these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."

And as He comes into our world, He shows us how poor are the things we count great, how shoddy our splendour, how tawdry our luxury, how weak and worthless the social standing upon which we pride ourselves. He changes all our ideas, our values of things.

There came a man, whence none can tell,  
Bearing a touchstone in His hand,  
And testing all things in the land  
By his unerring spell.  
Quick births of transmutation smote  
The fair to foul, the foul to fair,  
Purple nor ermine did He spare,  
Nor scorn the dusty coat.

And as we keep in His company we see the things that are worth while, things like love and service, and a clean conscience, and the insight that sees the will of God and finds Him in everything, and the heart knows His peace.

And in that light the illusion is gone, the ties



are broken, the things that held us hold us no more, and He becomes all in all. That is His victory, the victory in which He sets men free.

Is not that worth while even if He did nothing else? Is it not worth while to be thus delivered from fear and to be filled with a purpose that takes up all our heart and mind. General Booth was once asked what was the secret of his happiness in service. He answered, "It is that, from the moment I first gave myself to Christ, He has had all of me there is." Is there any bigger gift that anyone can give us than to win us into this wholeheartedness? For to be delivered from fear is to be free from the thing that most of all haunts men's hearts and keeps them in bondage. To be won by a great purpose and a task that captures all our manhood is to have the real secret of joy and peace. Jesus calls us because He has the power to make us; and to be made by Christ, to have the touch of His hands upon us, His spirit upon our lives, so that we are free for the purposes of God, is the very prize of life.

## THE ONLY ADEQUATE FAITH

1 JOHN v.—“ This is the victory that overcometh the world, even, our faith.”

“ Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.”

IT is an easy thing in these days to give assent to the first statement—that faith is the victory that overcometh the world. The power of faith has become one of our modern platitudes. We may not live by it, but we accept it—in certain directions at least. The outstanding quality of the people who do big things in business and science and discovery, is faith. By faith, men have tunnelled the mountains ; they have bridged the seas ; they have fashioned the aeroplane and invented the wireless. Faith has swept the word “ impossible ” out of the scientist’s dictionary. So far from disposing of miracles, the age we live in has multiplied them till the miraculous has become the commonplace. Nature is at the feet of man with all her resources, and every other day some new door begins to open upon discoveries that would have made our forefathers stiff with surprise. And it is faith that has done it. “ This is the victory that overcometh the world,” says

John. He never spoke a truer word, if we relate it to the world of nature.

Of course he was not thinking of the world of nature, but of another region where, in the meantime, conquest tarries. John was thinking of the world of men—a society whose ideals were base, and whose influence was against the Kingdom of God. The world as he saw it had much good in it, but its dominant spirit was “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.” This spirit pervaded every quarter of it—temples, palaces, places of business, halls of amusement, homes and streets alike—and rose, when it was challenged, like a coiled snake ready to strike. It was this world, with all the strength and beauty that made its life so base and could have made it so splendid, of which John was thinking. It was the business of Christian men to penetrate this world with the mind and spirit of Christ and transform it into the Kingdom of God. By faith, only by faith, could it be done. The world of society is still waiting for the pioneers, the adventurers, the men of creative spirit, who will bring to light its spiritual treasures and, in the name of the Kingdom of God, will do for it what the scientists and explorers have done, in the name of civilisation, for the world of nature. When we believe in the possibilities of the world of

grace as the scientists believe in the possibilities of the world of nature, and are as ready to make sacrifices for it, the Kingdom of God will be at hand. "For this," says John, "is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

But then he goes a step further. He goes on to specify what this faith is: "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." The heart and soul of faith is this belief and conviction about Jesus. John was writing to people among whom a peculiar heresy had begun to creep in—the strange idea that Jesus was not real. He was only a kind of stage figure, a shadow Christ, whose temptations were only a sham fight, His sufferings only like a picture on a screen. It was the idea that the Incarnation, as we call it, was not real, that God was not really there. John saw that in such an idea there was no grip for faith, no root in real experience from which faith could spring. Against this he sounded his trumpet call. Jesus is a real person. In Him we genuinely meet with God; in Him God is at work in history. Again and again the Apostle declares his conviction that this belief is vital to Christianity. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

This age of ours is not very tolerant of

theology. Some people put the whole thing off with the old tag that it does not really matter what a man believes—a dictum disproved, by the way, by every prosecution of a communist. There is a reason, doubtless, for this indifference. Some of the great truths stated in the ancient creeds have become crusted with outworn ideas, like a ship after a long voyage with barnacles, so that they impede the living movement of the Spirit. Some of them have become for certain people only a kind of magical incantation that has little influence upon their life, and nothing can be so deadening as the repetition of a formula.

But the last thing religion can afford to do, is to be contemptuous of thought. A religion that is barren of ideas is bankrupt. Religion cannot live upon mere feeling any more than a man can live upon confectionery. Even right feeling cannot be kept alive in the heart except by the power of an idea in the mind. You cannot communicate feeling without truth, any more than you can make sad people merry by laughing when they do not know what you are laughing at. If we want to kindle emotion we tell a story, we paint a picture, we suggest a thought. These minds of ours are like islands, and the only way we can get from our mind into the mind of another is upon a bridge of thought. We give

our neighbour "a piece of our mind." We give him, that is, an idea. And these personalities of ours kindle into power, or fade into futility, according to the thoughts with which we occupy our minds. It is an accepted fact that Jesus is the most inspiring figure in history. But the moment we begin to think of Jesus we must have some thought about Him. It is said that F. W. H. Myers gave up Christianity because Christ had no "cosmic significance." But has He not? Where does He stand amid the ages? Where do we put Him against the background of the universe? And here is the point—the higher our thought of Jesus, the greater is His power over our souls. That is what John is pleading for, that thought of Jesus which can awaken the fullness of our power in such a world as this, that which can meet our needs and make us equal to the battle of the Kingdom and the tasks of God. No other view of Jesus will do justice to our experience. This is what John means when he says, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

If we are to recover the dynamic power of this belief, we have got to find out what it means. What does it mean for us to say that Jesus is the Son of God? It means that God is like Jesus. The Early Church really meant that,



when they thought of Christ as Divine. That was the amazing discovery that leaped to their minds when the fact of Jesus got home to their hearts. It was not that Jesus is like God, but that God is like Jesus. The God who was but half known, and for the most part feared and served in a kind of superstitious dread, had become known in the person of Jesus. The dull sky, with its clouds and shadows, had been lit with the light of His face. And the real question we have to face is this : What does it mean to us in the terms of our ordinary experience, in the attitude we take to the message of Jesus, in the way we deal with other people, in our whole outlook upon life, that God is like Jesus? Till we ask that question and answer it, the belief that Jesus is the Son of God has no real meaning. The faith that overcomes the world is that God is like Jesus. What does this imply?

## I

For one thing it offers a new outlook upon many of the dark facts of existence. Think of suffering and pain, for instance. How often do people blame God for these or, if they do not blame Him for them, at least attribute them to Him? The most familiar thing to hear people say in their distress is, " I wonder what I have

done that God should lay this upon me? ” And even if they do not resent this—and what looks like resignation is often only veiled resentment—the idea lies like a dark weight upon their spirits. Sometimes it has made them passive under troubles which they ought to have resisted, and patient with diseases which ought to have long since been swept out of the world. But if God is like Jesus, the real test of whether a thing can be rightly attributed to God is the question whether it is a thing which Jesus would have done. Would Jesus have sent the scourge of typhoid? Would He have caused the Messina earthquake? Would He have dried up the fountains and provoked an Indian famine? The suggestion is incredible. At first sight, this seems to deepen the mystery ; and some people have unconsciously evolved from it two gods, one of whom is altogether good, and one a kind of devil. That is to make the confusion worse, to deepen the perplexity. It is perfectly true that these things—pain, suffering, distress—happen in a world of which God is the Creator. But surely the true solution of the problem is to be found by remembering that this world is only a world in the making. There are dark things in it because it is yet imperfect. But if Jesus reveals the Will of God, His coming means that God is seeking to redeem the world, to perfect it,

and in Jesus is calling us to help Him, as Jesus called out the faith and co-operation of men in fighting evil and overcoming disease. Is it not even the very goodness of God that He thus calls us into fellowship with Him in His redeeming purpose? Does it not mean that, having brought His universe so far out of "chaos and old night," the future waits upon our answer to His call in Jesus? Looking at it thus, a faith awakens which makes for a courageous optimism and puts heart and spirit into us: the faith that, behind and through everything, God works, striving and often baffled, yet victorious. His very love is seen in the fact that He offers us our part to play in shaping and developing the world, and thereby being ourselves shaped and developed. Does not that throw a new light upon the troublesome facts of life? This is a world half-finished, and the making of men is its real object. God's purpose of love is so wonderful that it must involve some experiences that try us to the core. And it must take time to work itself out. It is reported that Carlyle once asked an English prelate if he had a creed. "Yes," was the reply, "and the older I get, the firmer that creed grows beneath my feet. There is only one thing that staggers me—the slow progress that creed makes in the world." "Oh," said Carlyle, "but with such a creed you can

afford to wait." With such a faith we can afford to wait—and, if need be, to suffer. "Now we see not *yet* all things put under Him," says the writer to the Hebrews, "but we see Jesus"; and if God is like Jesus, we can face anything.

## II

But this faith is not merely a comfort; it is a challenge. The belief that God is like Jesus has something to say to us that has a very real bearing upon our situation to-day. For if God is like Jesus, the message of Jesus about the true way of living, about love and that fellowship and co-operation which is the logic of love, has an authority which is far greater than we often give it. No one who knows the New Testament, especially certain parts of the message of Jesus, will deny its bearing upon our social life, our business life, our life among the nations. Jesus has amply won His right to direct our conduct. In that sphere He is master. To say that anything is un-christian is tantamount to saying that it is wrong. That is admitted by all sorts of people. It is admitted by those who tell themselves that the application of His principles is impossible. It is hopelessly impractical, they say, in our present competitive system of society to be Christian out-and-out; and they attempt to

draw a line up to which it is possible to be Christian and beyond which it is hopeless to try. It is even admitted by people who say that because they feel it hopeless to go all the way they are not going to be hypocrites and go half-way—which may be only a coward's escape from a difficult situation. In Miss Fry's book on the work done by the Quakers in the Great War, there is a remarkable statement in the preface. The Quakers, when the war began, were excused from military service on the understanding that they would care for the sick and wounded, and none could have shown more real self-sacrifice than they. But the condition was imposed that they were not to seek to spread their doctrine of non-resistance among the soldiers. They asked if there was any objection to reading the New Testament to soldiers in hospital. To that the official answer was given, after consideration, that, while the New Testament was all right, "parts of it might be very dangerous." That may sound amusing, but there is a cold truth in it we shall do well to face. The New Testament has an explosive power in its ideas which, let loose, would be very destructive to some of our practices to-day, if it did not even come, in time, to alter the whole social and industrial fabric. But this means the honest facing of difficulties that seem beyond our

power to tackle. In fact, as things are, and if we are not ready to change things, Christianity is impracticable. What, then, are we to do about it? Are we to do what Germany did before the war—consign our Christianity to the region of our homes—domesticate it, so to speak, and give the rest of life over to selfishness?—or what the monks of old did—try to find a quiet corner where we can cultivate our religion away from these perplexities? This may sound absurd, but are there not multitudes who try to do it; whose habit it is to give an hour on Sunday to the reflection upon ideas and the consent to an ideal, which, beyond a certain point, is never seriously taken into the street or the market-place?

But what if God is like Jesus? What if these principles of His, instead of being impracticable dreams, are the unveiling of the way in which God means the world to work, so that if it does not work in that way it is bound to meet disaster, like an engine defying the rules of mechanics? That is precisely what Christ claims for His message—that love is the law of life. If this faith is ours, the only thing we dare do is to hold on to our ideals, though they create a tension in our souls, between what is and what ought to be, that breaks our peace. It is to hold on and stand fast, and get



something done wherever we can, caring for no opposition ; and suffering no shallow demonstration of the impossibility of a Christian order of life or industry to stifle our conviction, or keep us from honest thinking, or dry up our prayers. Things are changed by a faith that defies obstacles and laughs at impossibilities, and in no other way. That faith conquers. For, in time, God builds these seeming dreams of ours into the substance of abiding realities. He that overcometh the world is he who believes that Jesus speaks with the insight and authority of God.

### III

And again, this faith means an invitation to a real contact with God. If God is like Jesus one thing is sure—He **is** available. He is near. For Jesus was available. Who so approachable as He? Who so accessible, so open to people with real needs? Two things always happened when people got into the company of Jesus. One was that they became aware that He had entry to their minds—to the secrets of their souls—they could not keep Him out. They felt as some creature of the deep must feel when a searchlight from the upper world for the first time penetrates his comfortable obscurity. There were no reserved compartments of the

mind for a man who stood near Jesus—no screens that could prevent His looking through. And if that man were ready and willing, a second thing happened. Jesus became equally accessible to him ; he got right into His mind, into His heart. See how lavishly Jesus poured out the treasure of His friendship upon the disciples. At first they did not understand it ; but later on, when they were willing, it came to its fruit in a living sympathy which opened the gates of heaven. Ah, but you say, He is now so far away !

Comes faint and far Thy voice  
From distant Galilee.  
The vision fades mid ancient shades :  
How can I follow Thee ?

But if God is like Jesus—God who never fails, or changes ; God whose spirit is in the order and beauty and life of the universe ! Does it not challenge us as to whether our difficulties in the region of faith have been real, or whether our doubts have been honest ? Is it not rather that we have been living below the poverty line, below the level of spiritual efficiency, living a starved life, if God is like Jesus, so accessible, so open, so near ? If God is like Jesus, He reaches us, in every breath of Christ's Spirit, in every glance of His eye, in every flash of His mind, in every beat of His heart. In Jesus we have the

focus-point where God's light burns and glows in such a way that it can kindle our dull hearts with His infinite and inexhaustible love. Up in the hills, where the rains fall and the springs and the streams so often run to waste, they sometimes build a reservoir to catch the waters, and out of that reservoir they lead a channel down into the valley where, in a factory, they turn the power of it into light and heat. Through that channel, simple and unobtrusive, the factory takes into its heart the power of the everlasting hills. The influence of Jesus is the channel through which we become linked with God. Is not this a challenge as to whether our faith is real and how real it is? For surely all things are possible—all strength in weakness, all grace in temptation—to the man who believes that in Jesus, in every contact with His mind and spirit, he is in touch with the everlasting God. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

Once Jesus challenged His disciples with the question, "Whom say ye that I am?" It was not merely a theoretical answer He wanted. They were going out on a difficult road together. Their loyalty would be strained to breaking-point. Could they get through? Could they hold out? Would they stand up to the tension,

to the strain? That was what Jesus was really asking them. How far would they go in loyal obedience, in trusting Him, in facing death? And when Peter, in a flash of insight that pierced to the real meaning of all the impressions Christ had been making on his soul, burst out with his adoring confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Jesus saw the power which would be wielded by a man with a faith like that. He saw the resources of personality it would unseal within the man, the obstacles he would be able to overcome, the stand he would one day make against drift and death. He saw, in fact, the possibility of a world redeemed, and He replied, "Blessed art thou, Peter. For I say unto thee thou art a rock, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

## OUR REPLY TO LIFE

JOHN xii.—“ Now is My soul troubled ; and what shall I say ?  
Father, save Me from this hour : but for this cause  
came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.”

THIS incident is generally supposed to be John's version of the story of Gethsemane. The other historians tell us a little of what took place in the soul of Jesus as He knelt in the garden. John draws back the veil and lets us further into His mind. Jesus had come to the very threshold of Calvary. There He was beset by doubts and fears and perplexities. Was this the only way ? Was there no other road to His victory over evil in the hearts of men ? The visit of the Greeks which John reports may have started some of these questions. Here, when all other doors were barred by blindness, there was a hint that one door stood open—the door into the wider world. Beyond that door—came the whisper in His soul—who knows but that there might be a hearing, an appreciation of His message, a welcome for His gospel ? Why turn away from this promising road, to sink His light for ever in a swamp of malice and lovelessness. The doubts and perplexities began to thicken about

His mind. Already He could hear the mutterings of wrath which were gathering for a tempest. The sky about Him was growing dark with the forecast of doom. He was like a ship which for some time has been moving out to sea amid a gathering storm, and now begins to feel the buffeting of the waves and the vicious blast of the gale which is very shortly going to take her to its breast. Wave after wave comes breaking in upon Him, bringing the grim foretaste of worse to come. "Now is my soul troubled," said Jesus. "Now is my soul disquieted."

That is the picture that John sets before us—the picture of a man facing the very worst that life can do. Let us realise that. He is facing the very worst that man can ever suffer. It is true that people have suffered crucifixion before and since. They have been burnt at the stake. They have endured physical agonies. But the physical was only a fraction of what Jesus was facing. For no one ever loved as He. And love means capacity for pain. Loneliness, hatred, treachery, were all in the cup set for Jesus; and this above all, that in crucifying Him they were putting to death their own souls. Every form of suffering was threatening Jesus—the suffering of a patriot who sees his country destroying itself, of a leader whose men desert him, of a friend whose friends betray him, of a



mother whose children deny her, of a Saviour who is slain by those whom He loves even unto death. That is John's picture of Jesus as He moves onwards to the Cross. Can we wonder that His soul is troubled?

But the point to notice is that this suffering, as suffering so often does, awakens a question. Our question in regard to suffering is often the question, Why? Why is it that we have been brought into this trouble? Why is it that we have had to go through so much? That is not the question of Jesus. He does not ask, Why do I suffer? His question is, What shall I say? Now is my soul disquieted, and what shall I say? In other words, What answer shall I make to life which so threatens and opposes me? What reply shall I give to those fears and doubts and shadows that rise within my soul? What attitude shall I take to this tempest that swirls around my head and buffets my mind and spirit? That is the real question which life ought to awaken—the question that helps a man, in the face of life at its worst, to rally his soul and make the right stand. What reply shall I make to life? It is this question which determines whether he shall go up or down, whether he shall let himself drift, as it were, and become the plaything of life and circumstances; or whether he shall find in life a

challenge to courage and faith, a challenge that releases unseen powers within him, and may turn a commonplace life into that of a hero or a saint.

## I

It is the belief of all those who have thought deeply about life and the troubles that come to all who take life seriously, that these troubles have a meaning, and that their meaning is to awaken a reply, and such a reply as shall make us the masters of circumstances and not their slave. Crave, as we may, for an easy life and an untroubled way, one clear fact rises from the story of man's victory and progress. It is by the sting of hardship and opposition and difficulty that his spirit has been awakened. Scientific men are coming to feel that this is even true, in a sense, of the lowest forms of life out of which man has been developed. When Darwin published his famous *Origin of Species*, in which he sought to prove that created life has been evolved by the survival of the fittest in the struggle of life—defining the fittest as those which were best adapted to their environment—people who were always on the look-out for something that would justify them in thinking that man is merely the slave of circumstances hailed this discovery with delight. We are the

products of our environment, they said ; we can only be what our world makes us. Why, then, need we further trouble ourselves with this dream of freedom ? But of late the scientists have been opening their minds to a deeper view. They have suggested that even in the lowest creatures there is some speck of will which is stung into effort by opposition, and which makes progress by overcoming difficulties. Professor J. A. Thomson puts the matter in a striking phrase : “ The response of the organism to external stimulus,” he says, “ is of the nature, not of a rebound, but of a reply.” In other words, the progress of creation rising out of swamp and jungle has been won by struggle with circumstances, not by surrender to them. Life has not been mechanically moulded by environment ; it has grown by resistance and attack. Nature has touched life and awakened a reply from something akin to a living spirit. At any rate, when we come to think of the soul of man, is not this true ? Has not the finest character been developed by adverse circumstances ? Is it not this fact which finds its witness in every heroic life, in every man who has been successful in business, in science, or in exploration ? Life was hard, and it demanded from them a reply, and their reply was some stroke of courage, some step of faith, some energy of struggle

which produced a victorious personality. It is this which makes Browning cry :

Then welcome each rebuff  
Which turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand, but go.  
Be our joy three parts pain,  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain.  
Learn, nor account the pang. Dare, never grudge the throe.

The other day a man died whose life was summed up in this suggestive sentence : " He was one of those unique gifts to the world—a creative spirit whose response to life was so transforming that he vivified life for all who came within his range." His response to life was transforming. That was always his outlook, and it changed him and changed the world for others. So it was with Christ.

" Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say ? " What reply shall I make to life ?

There are various answers that a man may give to that question. Some, like Hamlet, never get beyond the hesitation point ; they are content with asking :

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing, end them ?

But Hamlet's tragic end is a true picture of what happens when a man is content to let life slip through his hands without giving answer to the

question. Half the tragedies of life come of the fact that people either spend their time evading its challenge by taking what shelter they can from its troubles; or, when troubles come, stand helpless in the midst of them, refusing to make up their minds what reply to make to life. We may, of course, make reply that life is an evil thing, and that the best thing we can do is to eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die. But the real beginning of Christianity is in this decision—in making up our minds for once and all what reply we are going to make to life in the hour when our soul is troubled with pain or disquieted by temptation. Perhaps we have never finally settled that question. Out there in the world our soul is going to be troubled and disquieted by some threatening. What shall we say to its fears, its doubts, its difficulties, its temptations, its low and selfish suggestions? What reply are we going to make to life?

## II

What was the reply of Jesus? The first word He spoke gives us the clue to His attitude. He said, "Father." Out there in the gathering storm He saw many things. Blow upon blow of hatred, cruelty, malice, treachery, were preparing to strike Him down. Many people have

looked into that kind of tempest and seen nothing except a blinding mist. They have said there is nothing there, no voice, or touch, or any that regardeth. Life is without purpose or meaning, "a thing of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Some have looked into it and seen a glimmering purpose striving blindly through the storm to some great end which is beyond us—but without heart, without tenderness, without any care for our individual lives. Jesus looked into it and He said, "Father." He recognised someone there who loved Him, whom He knew as His Father, whose love enfolded His life. He saw God victorious amid all this strife of man's puny plans and selfish passion, one who could triumph over it and bring forth, out of the devil's cauldron, the medicine for human sin. Jesus recognised His features, and heard, amid the growing din of wrathful voices, the whisper of His voice saying, "This is My beloved Son." That word "Father" was *His* reply to the challenge of evil, to all the fears and threatenings—the reply of faith, of confidence in God's love and care and fatherly purpose. That sense of God's love was His most precious possession. It had been growing deeper and stronger all His life. It is the most wonderful thing in all human experience—Jesus' consciousness of God. Men may



call it a dream if they will. But *He* was the most clear-eyed soul who ever lived ; without the smallest rag of an illusion clinging to His mind about anything. We can see it from the way in which He penetrated into the heart of sin and hypocrisy. Was there ever One so open to reality as Jesus, at every point where we can test Him? Most of us are doped and drugged at some point or other. We live in a kind of dreamland of deception about many things—the value of money, for instance, and pleasure. We are always finding ourselves out, if we try to be honest with the world we live in. Jesus saw life bare to the buff all through. And to Him the consciousness of God the Father was the most real thing in His life. Even when things looked blackest, and when everything around Him shrieked against it, it held. It was rock beneath His feet. “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?” And the first word that slipped out in reply was—“Father.”

There is something worth thinking about here. Some people tell us that the Christian faith in the Fatherhood of God and in His loving purpose is far too frail a thing to stand the strain of life. It is all very well for a world when things go smoothly ; it is too delicate a thing for rough usage. But it was just *here* that Jesus

said, "Father." His was no fair-weather faith. It was a faith that stood the test when life was at its worst. Here is One who probed suffering to its utmost depths. He went along the corridor of life right through to its darkest cranny, like an explorer in some cavern which has never been open to the light, or on a road where men are afraid there may be only a quicksand. And He has come back to tell us that there, where things are at their worst, this faith holds. This experience of God's love is solid all through, and carries all the way. It is worth thinking about, that His reply to life at its worst is to cry, "Father." That is His answer to all the doubts and the threatenings and the fears. Somewhere, at the heart of all experience, there is a living, loving Will, One who knows us for His children, and who out of it all has guidance and strength to give us, and the grip of a hand by which He can pull us through. Beneath the Falls of Niagara there is a cave called the Cave of the Winds. And visitors are permitted with a guide to go down into it. When you are there, you feel at first nothing except the deafening roar of waters, while your eyes are filled with blinding spray. But there is one thing of which you are gladly conscious—the grip of the guide's hand, by which you are led through to safety and sunlight. That was the

experience of Jesus here. It is this faith which He offers us, and offers it not merely as a theory of life or a doctrine to be blindly accepted. He offers it as a confidence which He can give by the infection, the radiance of His own Spirit. "His response to life was so transforming" that he transforms life for all who know Him, and lights up the world with the face of God. As we stand near Him there, amid the cloud and darkness that were around His Spirit, something shines into our hearts—a confidence, a peace, a courage, a faith which sinks in deeper than all the fears and the doubts; and there awakens, in reply to life, the same answer—"Father."

### III

But this attitude to life took further form. It shaped itself into a prayer. And what did He pray? "Father, save Me from this hour"? That might have been His prayer, He reflected. But no! For He reflected again, "For this cause came I unto this hour." In other words He did not ask for escape from life as it threatened Him. Life does not bring us into trouble that we should use our faith merely to escape from it. Some bigger, stronger reply He must make who had God for Father. And He went on, "Father, glorify Thy name." In

other words, He did not ask to be saved *from* trouble, which is no salvation at all. He asked to be saved *in* trouble—to be saved from discouragement and fear and lovelessness and everything in Him which might defeat God's purpose of love, and keep Him from mirroring God's glory. He asked to be saved from all that might keep His Spirit from burning with that love and courage which are the glory of God in men, and through which God rules and works victoriously over evil. He asked that in the midst of the trouble His Spirit might be an undimmed lamp for God's light—"Father, glorify Thy name." Reveal Thy Spirit in Me at its best and fullest. "Father, glorify Thy name." The result of that prayer was a reply to life in the Spirit of Jesus which is the most wonderful and victorious thing in all history, a reply of love and forgiveness and courage which changed the heart of the dying thief as he hung cursing on his cross, and made even the Roman captain who was directing the crucifixion cry, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Is this not the way in which Jesus calls on us too, and inspires us to make our reply to life? We are so apt to pray to be saved from the hour of our soul's disquiet and to look to God's Fatherhood for our deliverance out of the

trouble, out of the danger, out of the threatening sorrow. There are times, of course, when that is His way of deliverance. But God's answer to our deepest need is not the external deliverance, and it is not this attitude which is the Christian reply to life. The true reply is that of Jesus. Make me fit for the strain, O God. Give me courage for the load. Let me not falter in the midst of the trouble. Let me not fail in the hour of temptation. "Father, glorify Thy name." That kind of prayer never fails of an answer, and the true answer—because the real result of prayer is what it enables us to be.

My sorrow had pierced me through ; it throbbed in my heart  
like a thorn.

This way and that I turned like a bird with a broken limb  
Hearing the hound's strong feet thrust imminent through  
the corn.

Then to my God I turned ; and I had forgotten Him.

What was the answer ? This—the horrible depth of night  
And deeper, as ever I peer, the huge cliff's mountainous  
shade,

While the frail boat cracks and grinds, and never a star in  
sight,

And the seething waves smite fiercer—and yet I am not  
afraid.

That is the kind of prayer which Jesus bids us pray. It is the attitude to life He bids us follow Him in taking up. It is the way in which all the external deliverances are really wrought—not by the act of God without, digging us out of

difficulty or breaking down the walls of opposition ; but through His coming into our hearts so that we may dig our own way out, and His awaking the spirit in us which can conquer and rise above the trouble. The key to the transforming of life is the spirit which is one with Jesus, one with Him in His courage, His faith, His patience, His love. The world's prisons and crosses are not abolished by a force that breaks open the one or pulls down the other. They are abolished by the spirit of the men who suffer them, making it intolerable for their fellows to go on maltreating them. Life meets us, challenges us, overshadows us—to throw us on God, that in us He may rise to overcome it. The true victory of God in a world of evil is not that world made beautiful by some stroke of His power : it is in the hearts of men who are made strong and pure in Him, a new creation through which all things become new.



## REAL AND UNREAL RELIGION

I SAMUEL iv.—“ And when the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “ Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before our enemies? Let us fetch the ark of the Lord out of Shiloh, that when it has come among us, it may save us from the hand of our enemies.”

MATTHEW vi.—“ Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

IT was a very dark hour for the people of Israel. The trouble was that they had fallen away from a real religion. They did not know what was wrong with them, though they knew that something was badly wrong. The one hopeful moment was when they began to ask the reason, and to probe down to the roots of their weakness. “ Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before our enemies? ” There is hope for a nation even in its blackest hour, if it begin to ask questions like these, and to examine whether or not it has fallen out of the grace of God. In fact, there is no hope for a nation, in its defeat, when things go wrong, till it begins to put that question. Most wrong things in life can be tracked down to this root, especially the wrong things in the life we live together ; for all that concerns our life concerns our relation with God. How

can we hope to be at peace in the world, either within or without, till we are at one with the spirit and purpose of Him who controls the whole ?

These Israelites did the right thing to begin with. They began to ask the question that brought God into their thoughts ; but, instead of sitting down quietly to think things out, they acted upon an impulse of the moment. Their thoughts turned to the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence in their midst. The ark served a very useful purpose—the same purpose as the presence of a church in a busy street. It reminded them of God, their true leader, and that they could never get anywhere that was worth getting to unless they were in touch with Him. But religion had fallen so low that they identified the ark of God with God's presence and power, as if, somehow, it contained Him ; and they felt that, if only they brought it on to the field of battle, this box of wood and gold would save them from defeat. So they cried, " Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh, that when it cometh, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies."

So they brought the ark of God on to the field of battle. But all in vain. At first the Philistines were afraid, but the final result

was that fear made them fight the harder, till the Israelites were driven from the field, and the ark was left in the hands of their enemies. In point of fact, this was the best thing that could have happened to the Israelites, for it taught them some things about God and the way in which He helps us that are vital for real religion. They did not always remember the lesson. Again and again they relapsed into primitive superstition. But the story stands to teach us something of what religion really means, and what it does not mean.

## I

The first mistake they made was in identifying the presence of God with this wooden box. It had become to them a sacred thing, a fetish, an object which they imagined secured to them, just because it was there, the help and favour of God. Fetish worship is a very primitive stage in religion. It consists in regarding certain things as sacred ; it may be a tree, or a house, or an animal. In a heathen country many curious objects are supposed to have this sacred quality. They must not be touched by profane hands, and they are thought to secure for the worshipper, contact with the higher powers. It is an effort to find contact with

a world of spiritual reality. Yet it is an early stage in religion, a stage to which men seem always prone to return when they stop thinking and primitive feeling arises and gets control. To-day we have our sacred places ; churches, altars, even our sacred officials. There is a tendency, if we do not think clearly, to identify these places and things with the presence of God, as if somehow they possess a holy force or quality which does not belong to other things that have not been so consecrated. The result is a false reverence and a misplaced devotion for some things, while we tend to secularise others and consign them to the sphere of what is common and non-religious. For instance, we call our churches sacred, but the result may be to treat our homes and offices and factories as secular. We may regard the crucifix as sacred, while we look on the burdens that men carry for the sake of Christ as secular. We may consider our pulpits sacred and feel that truth should be spoken there, while we look on the platform as secular, and are, perhaps, not so particular about our utterances there. And so life may unconsciously be divided up into sacred and secular. The whole distinction is false. There are no sacred material things in any true sense of the word, for material things cannot contain the presence of God. Nothing

that we touch or handle can communicate to us the Divine Spirit. The truly sacred thing is personality, and what belongs to it. Love and righteousness are sacred ; truth is sacred. There is only one sacred kind of action, and that is the right action. There is only one sacred place, and that is the place in which we meet with God, which may be every place. There is only one sacred message, and that is the message of truth, whoever speaks it. This whole business of making things sacred is a species of primitive religion. It is a reversion to paganism. The ark of God might bring the thought of God to the minds of the Israelites ; it might remind them of His nature, His righteousness, His love—but it could not contain Him, nor communicate Him. A church may help us, through its associations ; it may constrain our minds, through its beauty or symbolism, to think about God—but it cannot, of itself, bring us into touch with God, for God dwells in the heart. His Spirit finds abode in our souls ; in all true thoughts we think ; in the impulses to goodness and right that spring up within us ; and in the souls of other people whom we can help and who can help us. It is thus we find God, or we do not find Him at all. Our reverence should be given to the right thing ; to the purpose of God for

which He bids us live ; to the souls which God has given us ; to the people whom we can help or love. These are sacred. But to give our reverence to mere material things, however exalted be their uses, is to revert to fetishism, with its false reverence for sticks and stones ; to side-track our religious life amid idolatry.

The second mistake these people made is one that naturally follows from this misplaced reverence. They imagined that, in bringing the ark upon the field of battle, they were bringing God to their side. They rightly believed that nothing could stand against God, if only they could persuade Him to act, but they imagined that the ark itself would perform the miracle. It was only a trick—what we call magic, of the same quality as rubbing a fairy lamp or waving a magic wand. It was a totally wrong view of God and of His way with us, to suppose that this wooden box, brought to the field of battle, would effect a change in the situation and give them the victory. What a conception of God and of His activity ! That He so works in this world that His blessing is contained in a necromantic charm which will ward off evil and bring good fortune.

What should they have done ? They knew that something was wrong ; they should have asked themselves what it was. They should



have looked into their lives to see if their hearts were set on seeking what God would have them seek. They should have asked if they were living in a spirit of righteousness. They should have fallen on their knees in a great humility, and asked to be shown His will, that they might do it. They should have besought Him to bring them back to such a true sense of His love and care as would compel them to trust in Him and in His strength, and lead them to walk by the guidance of conscience. No doubt, at the moment, all this was beyond them. Their thoughts were steeped in superstition. What they did was, perhaps, the best they could do at their stage ; but it was useless, as they discovered, and later on they learnt the better way.

## II

The point for us is that real religion consists in getting into right relations with God. God cannot help us, except through the sincerity with truth in which we seek His will, and give ourselves to walk in it ; for God's help is in His fellowship. Any other way of approaching Him that falls short of this is a mere blindness of the spirit, a mere magical use of religion ; it is turning worship into a kind of charm. God helps us only through His fellowship, and His

fellowship can only be reached as we see what He is, and what He would have us to be, and as we allow Him to bring us into a real harmony of mind and spirit in which we seek to be one with Him.

When we look into the religious world of to-day, do we not find much of the same kind of unreality in religion as this old story lays bare? Are there not many primitive customs associated with religious observance that partake of the quality of a charm? Is it not possible that mere church-going, in itself, or taking part in a service, in itself, may be nothing more than a kind of magic? The day is past when people keep up the mere appearance of religion without some sense of reality. The pendulum has swung desperately the other way, in fact, and many people are cutting themselves adrift from religious observance because they imagine they can live without it. But we have still to be on our guard against the tendency to feel that there is merit in attending a religious service ; or that somehow, just because we have been there, we have made it right with God and won some right to His favour. Is there not still a temptation to think that the mere saying of prayers, or the act of getting on our knees for a moment, will somehow work mysteriously for our good, or protect us from

evil during the day? And, because we have done this kind of sacred deed, recited this kind of prayer, and there is no result, we have a grievance. We need to remember that it is not the words we say, or the posture we adopt, that matters; the real question is—Are we seeking to be open to God? No one expects a response from a wireless receiver unless it is tuned, the interruptions cut out, and the sensitive point reached where the wave-length will put us in touch with the speaker or singer at the other end. And, unless our hearts and minds are tuned to the mind of God, unless we are open to receive His truth and seeking it in sincerity, prayer may be nothing but the performance of magic—an attempt to use a charm.

Let us get back to reality in religion. There has been no time in the world's life when it has been more essential than now to recover the spirit of the message of the ancient prophet—spoken in days when religion was divorced from life—"Is it such a fast that I have chosen; a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Is not this the fast that I have chosen; to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and to bring the poor

that are cast out to thy house?" So spake Isaiah when the children of Israel were exiled in Babylon—seeking to show them how they might return to Jerusalem, in body and spirit, by a return to real fellowship with God.

And this incident has meaning for us. Whenever we are faced with trouble, whether in business, or in the home, or in any other part of our life, when times are out of joint, we know in our hearts that there are things which only God can put right. The message of all trouble is that we should open our hearts to Him. That was one thing which trouble always did for the people of the Bible. It set them thinking again of the God they had forgotten. Deep in our hearts, we know that somehow He is the key to the situation which is too much for us. How are we to find it? Only by seeking to be right. Has selfishness been eating into our hearts? Has some sin or wrong way of life been fastening its tentacles, like a poisonous thing, in our spirit, and sucking away our moral stamina? The way back is to be willing to set things right; it is to see His love for us, pouring itself around us like a great flood, and to ask for grace to respond to it—for grace to set right our relations with other people. The way of God's help is the way of His fellowship, and the way of His fellowship is the way

of every other kind of fellowship ; it is through the harmony of our mind and will with His. "Grant that we may never seek," prayed Augustine, "to bend the straight to the crooked, that is Thy will to ours, but help us to bend the crooked to the straight, that is our will to Thine." The same thing is true of our national life. There is something unreal in the appointment of days of prayer in national emergencies, unless through that prayer we are seeking to be open to God's light. The only true approach to God is by the sincerity that asks to be shown the right way of life for each of us in our own place in the community, and for the nation as a whole ; and if our hearts are open, and all our cards are on the table—to use a commonplace metaphor—and all our prejudices in the melting-pot, that truth and right may be everything, we shall find the way of hope, for we shall find God.

It is a question, in point of fact, whether we shall ever get the help we need in any particular trouble, so long as we are mainly concerned with the trouble. For the trouble is often only the symptom that something is wrong, and no wise physician ever thinks he can cure a trouble by tackling the symptoms. There are people, for instance, who seek God's help in a temptation. It may be something unclean which fills them with self-loathing ; and they long desperately

for a strong clean manhood, and for a recovery of self-respect. And so they pray, and nothing happens. The real reason is that they are seeking the help of God for an ideal of their own self-respect, not for the sake of the kingdom of God. In a way, they are seeking to exploit the grace of God for a purpose of their own. And the only way in which they can find deliverance is by a self-forgetfulness that only seeks for the service they can do—a service to which God is calling them. Then they discover that the habit is broken by the expulsive power of a new purpose, a new affection, that casts out the obsessing selfishness. It is the same with seeking the aid of religion to get rid of fears and other troubles of the mind. It is making use of God, or attempting to do so, for some self-centred purpose. But to seek God for some high service into which He is calling us, and for that purpose to be rid of our fears—that is the way of deliverance.

This is God's world, and we can only have His gifts on His terms, which is to put Him first. Some people long for a Christianity strong enough to put an end to war. And why? Because they hate bloodshed and dispeace and the disturbance of business—not in reality because they hate hatred and feel the tragedy of the unbrotherly spirit. There is no real



peace that can come to the world except in the measure in which men allow Christ to make them brotherly. It is the same with the social conditions in which we live. The earth is dark with injustice and misery. But it will never become clean and sweet till we are seeking in it not more loaves, but more love. It all comes back to the word of Christ. Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God, and all these things—the things for want of which we are dogged with moral failure and broken with dispeace—will be added unto you.

### III

God's help is in His fellowship, shaping us into the kind of people He wants us to be, and into the use He is able to make of us through His guiding and our obedience. The trouble with many people is that they are more concerned about God's help than they are about His fellowship; they are more intent on their own advantages, or their own deliverance, than they are on His will. That is where an unreal religion has its roots. We are more anxious that God should be on our side than that we should be on His. It may be that if these Israelites had taken the right way, and on their knees had asked for God's guiding, seeking to

know His will—it may be that they would have found a new strength to overcome their enemies ; for a clean heart and a right spirit are the real springs of intellectual and physical vitality. We are finding that out to-day in all kinds of ways. We are discovering that a new spirit within often means a new health of body. Symptoms which are physical may have spiritual roots ; they are the sign that something is wrong within, in the attitude to life and to God. The value of what we call Faith Healing lies in the discovery that health of body and health of spirit are intimately connected. It is historic fact that the days when the people of Israel were able to stand up to their enemies and carry everything before them, were days when their lives were purest, and their hearts most set on righteousness. There is a real connection between the vitality of a nation in the face of difficulties, and the faith they carry in their hearts. The great ages of art and music, and of all the fine blossoms of the human spirit in creative achievement, were the ages of faith. New capacities and energies awake within us when we are right with God and have inward peace and joy ; and it may happen that troubles will vanish and, through faith, be overcome in the new and real contact with Him.

But, again, it may not so happen. The  
Lc

trouble may not be escaped. The Israelites might have been defeated just the same. But here is the point—they would have been able to face their defeat ; they would have had the right attitude to it ; they would have found God in it, and so in defeat would have been victorious ; even as Jesus was victorious on the Cross, although He died on it. Through their defeat they would have found the larger victory.

There is no necessary connection between an untroubled life and a quiet conscience, a fact which the people of the Old Testament never could understand, but which the Cross made plain. There have been saints, and we have all known them—men and women who have lived with God, and yet have had to meet trouble upon trouble. But, as succeeding waves passed over them, they have stood up to the flood with courage, and in their troubles have found a securer peace and a larger victory, than even if the storm had passed them by. The real question is not whether our lives are untroubled, but whether our hearts are at peace. The true success of life does not depend on the fact that we do not meet with difficulty, but on the fact that we keep a brave spirit. The great thing is not to escape from sorrow or calamity, but in the midst of it not to become

bitter or hard or cynical; for that inward corrosion is the real defeat—the defeat of the spirit. True victory is not in overcoming our enemies, or even in turning them into friends; it is, in the face of their hostility, to possess the spirit of Christ; and, like the dying Stephen, to keep in our hearts beneath the stoning the forgiving grace that can pray His prayer. When James Smethan, the artist, poet, and essayist, who spent most of his life in poverty, was asked why he went to church on Sunday he replied, “To get a blessing.” “And what is a blessing?” his friend asked. Whereupon Smethan replied, “Removal of the temptation to rage, and scorn, and indignation; a sweetness; a satisfaction with my lot; a content with God’s dealings. I went to church to-day, fretted with plenty of dark, vexing suggestions. I came away calm, sweet, fresh, all my cares gone, rejoicing in the God of my salvation, and I think no one is more happy than I. That is a blessing, and yet I know no more than I did at 7 p.m. who is going to buy my pictures, my poems, or my essays.”

How did Jesus win His victory over the Cross? Not by escaping from it; but by bearing, through all the suffering, the unconquerable spirit of love, even towards the men who were doing Him to death. That victory

has won a million victories, and has banished the Cross from countless Calvaries, on which, but for His spirit, men would have crucified their fellows. And He won His victory because He sought only to know the will of God—not to be saved from the Crucifixion, but to be saved in it.

There is only one true worship. It is the offering of our hearts to be God's temple. There is only one really sacred service ; it is to do His will in daily life and serve His children. There is only one sacred place ; it is in His world, where we may find His voice everywhere, and so find it hallowed with love and beauty. There is only one true prayer ; it is the prayer that begins—whatever it contains—and ends with this petition, “ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

## WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

2 CORINTHIANS v.—“If any man be in Christ he is a new creation. Old things have passed away, all things have become new.”

THERE are times when it is important to get back to the first elements in religion, and such, I believe, are the times in which we live. Nothing in the world is so frequently misunderstood as what it means to be a Christian man. If we were to ask a score of people, taken at random, this question, there would be some varied and curious answers. It would be strange, for instance, if we did not find the reply that Christianity is a magic prescription for making people good ; or that it is a kind of antiseptic against moral impurity ; or that it is a form of transaction with God that makes you sure about salvation in a future life and secure against the penalties of sin. It is even possible that some might reply that a Christian is a person who does not indulge in certain questionable habits. Such ideas as these are still common, so we cannot wonder that many people are confused in mind, and that Christianity often sounds, and sometimes looks, a very unattractive thing.

It is curious that not one of these ideas is



found in St. Paul's outlook. He never claimed, for instance, that Christ had made him a better man. It was true, but the fact did not strike him. He never identified Christianity with giving up things. He did give up things, and was ready to give up anything if he found that it stood in the way of his loyalty to Christ ; but self-denial for its own sake had no place in Paul's idea of the Christian life. His definition is quite different ; it is so startling that it makes us do some hard thinking. " If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation," a new kind of man, a different kind of man. He is not merely changed on the surface, not merely one who gives up some bad habits, or forms some new habits, or takes on some extra duties, or begins to do a bit of service. Some of these things may be a sign of a man's Christianity, but the essence of it is a radical change ; it runs right down to the roots of life. It is a change of heart, of nature. Some people tell us that you cannot change human nature. If that be so, we had better give up Christianity for good. For that is precisely what it sets out to do. If it does not do that, it has no more real power than any good system of morals.

" If any man be in Christ he is a new creation." He is so changed that everything else is changed. A man who has been in vital

contact with Jesus Christ is so different that he comes to live in a different world. The whole world around him vibrates with a new challenge and suggestion ; everything has a new look about it ; everything has a new meaning. For it is a well-known fact that when you change a man's outlook you change the whole world in which he lives, whether it be a cottage or a palace. He looks on everything with new eyes. "Old things have passed away, all things have become new."

## I

Now this is actually what happened in the case of the people who inhabit the New Testament pages, and of the people who stand out in history and biography as the true type of Christian manhood and womanhood. Take the case of Paul himself, for instance, and we find a change which is nothing short of a re-making. Here is a man who at one time hated Christ and all that He stood for. He was possessed by a ruthless ambition, which would use any weapon of cruelty or even murder to compass its design. But after he had met with Christ a change took place, so great that even the Christians could hardly take it in, and when he went to Jerusalem, after his conversion, they were afraid of him. Even with their

belief in the miraculous grace of God, it seemed almost too big an idea to accept that Jesus had changed Paul ; that the wolf had become a lamb, that the robber of sheep-folds had become a shepherd. And yet so it was. Paul now loved what he had once hated, and sought the friendship of the people he had once tried to slay. He was a " new creation."

Or think of St. Francis of Assisi, twelve centuries later. The same change is at work. When you meet him first, you find a man—rich, popular, selfish, self-loving—spending in a night what would have kept a score of people for a month. Bit by bit, there comes a change ; he is no longer happy in that kind of life ; it does not satisfy him ; he sees how empty is his tawdry world ; all his gay happiness is but a handful of withered leaves. Then there comes into his heart a great love for the poor, for the lepers, for the birds and flowers, for everything around him, a love whose secret is Jesus. He is a changed man ; he walks in a new world ; his values are turned upside down.

Or think of a man like John Wesley. No such startling outward change can be related of him, and yet the same change was there. You find him first at Oxford, a good straight man, living a life of disciplined piety, so that he and others were nicknamed " Methodists." Nothing can be

more exemplary. He even went out as a missionary to Georgia, hoping, as he said, to save his own soul. And yet, in later years, Wesley confesses that "till the change came, he was not a Christian at all." Then, in the meeting-house at Aldersgate Street, he says, "I felt my heart strangely warmed by the love of Christ." After that everything became different. He was a new man ; his religion of zealous and conscientious duty became a religion of joyful service, which sent him up and down the country for nearly fifty years, grudging no sacrifice, and all the time unconscious that he was doing anything very wonderful. Writing of the results of this change, Lecky the historian says "that it is scarcely too much to say that the event which took place in Aldersgate marks an epoch in English history." Wesley was a different man ; he was a "new creation."

These are outstanding examples of course. I do not suggest that this change only comes to such people, or only in this dramatic form. Millions of people have had it, and scarcely know how or when it came. They just grew into it. But the point is that Christian people are different from others, if their Christianity is real. There ought to be an accent of quality which can be felt even if it cannot be defined. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation."

## II

Now what is this difference? Can we put it in a word? Is it not just this, that a Christian is living not with self at the centre of his being, but with love for others there? He has ceased to have self on the throne and has begun to think of others, to feel with others. This sounds very simple and very commonplace. But it runs very deep; it is a difference at the very fount of our nature. To realise how deep it runs we have only to think of what we call the "natural man"—never in reality escaped from the jungle, however refined he may be. He thinks of himself, his rights, his possessions, his reputation, even his own perfection. You find this selfishness working out in all kinds of ways. You find it in the thoughtlessness of the wastrel, who does not care what harm his vicious habits may be doing to others; but you find it also in the man for whom other people are mere instruments to his own comfort and ease, and who is not content unless the whole home revolves around himself. You find it in the pride which is mere vanity of dress or good looks or ability; but you find it also in the spirit that will not suffer a rebuke or listen to another point of view. You find it in the worldly ambition of the man who seeks power and wealth for himself; but you

find it also in the man who is out for goodness and perfection for the subtle gratification of feeling that he has reached a higher level than others. All that outlook belongs to what Paul calls the "natural man."

But now look at the other ; he is not thinking only of his own rights, but also of the rights of others, of their right to manhood and womanhood, to friendship and love. He is not out merely for his own advantage ; he seeks to serve God and his fellows as life opens up opportunities. Through everything that meets him, his first thought is : what can he do to make life happier or better for his fellows. He is not conscious of a goodness of his own, for generally he does not believe he has any ; he is only conscious of the Love that fills his heart and longs to help others to know it too. For the chief mark of the new nature is that its goodness is spontaneous ; its duty is not a calculated or mechanical service. It is like a spring rising freely by its own inner impulse from some deep source within the heart. The best way to study this new nature is, of course, to look at Jesus, for in Him we see it in its perfection. No shadow of self falls across His spirit so completely did He live with his life-centre in others. It was His fellows He thought about all the time. In their sins He suffered, in their sorrows He wept, in all their



afflictions He was afflicted, in their gladness He rejoiced. Even when He hung on the Cross, what was His attitude? He was utterly one with his fellows even there—broken-hearted in the sheer completeness of His union with them. For it was themselves they were crucifying when they crucified Him, it was their own souls they were putting to death, and for Him that was the bitterest drop in His cup of agony. And yet, all through, there was no sense of despair or defeat, but a certain deep glad conviction that through this very agony he was giving Himself to them in a surrender that would issue in victory. Even through the Cross on which they crucified Him He would find the way to save them. That kind of nature is the “new creation,” for Jesus saves us by making us like Himself. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.”

This, then, is what it means to be saved. It is to be saved out of a life of which self is the centre, into a life of which love is the centre. Real salvation is deliverance from selfishness in all its forms, into love in all its forms. One of the biggest things that could happen at this moment in the Church’s and the world’s life is that people should come to see that sin is selfishness, selfishness appearing in pride and self-will and wrong ambition and greed and censoriousness and all manner of uncharitableness. That

is the root of all sin—just selfishness ; for it is the denial of our true nature as the children of the Father and as members of His family. The sooner we get this new outlook on the nature of sin, the sooner will the world be open to the light of a new day. “ The real test of our nearness to God,” says A. C. Benson, “ is the way we feel about one another.” And Mr. Galsworthy has a short story in which the same thing becomes clear. During the war a man found himself one of the jury at the trial of a soldier for attempted suicide. The reason the prisoner gave was that he could not bear to be parted from his wife. Most people laughed when he made the confession. But this jurymen began to think. He had caught a glimpse of something that had never come to himself, a love and sympathy for another, such that separation was intolerable ; and as he went home he longed to go to his wife and say, “ I’ve learned a lot to-day, Kate ; I’ve found out things I’ve never thought of. Life’s a wonderful thing, a thing one can’t live all to oneself, a thing one shares with everybody, so that when another suffers we suffer too. It came to me that what one has doesn’t matter ; it’s what one does and how one sympathises with other people. It came to me in the most extraordinary vivid way watching that poor little rat of a soldier in his trap. It’s

the first time I've ever felt the spirit of Christ. It's a wonderful thing, wonderful, really priceless."

This new outlook will bring new social and industrial relationships ; it will prevent us from looking upon men merely as things, as means to our selfish ends. The new nature, with its new desire, its new motive, its new feeling about others, will make everything new.

### III

But how does it come? The secret is, of course, in Jesus. "If any man be in Christ." How does He bring it ; for we cannot create it? The one thing which of ourselves we cannot do is to compel ourselves to love. There are various stages ; though with some all these stages are telescoped into a vivid moment, and the whole experience crystallises like that of the Apostle Paul. But in most cases the change is gradual. Yet when you get down to them, they have all the same elements. The first is that we see Christ in His love for us and for all men. Everything begins there. What a spirit was His ! What energy of love ! He awakens our admiration, our wonder. And then, as we look, He strikes our hearts with a certain shame. He throws up the shadows—

our meanness, our selfishness, our pride ; how little love we have even at the best ! It may take time for this judgment to come home. But it comes home—that is the universal experience. Jesus is the standard by which all human worth is tested ; His judgments work out in history even though men do not realise them at the time. The type of character which draws its beauty from His likeness is the type whose influence survives and works for progress. Whether we realise it or not, Christ is on the Judgment Seat to-day and ever. A party of tourists was once visiting a great picture gallery, and as they stopped in a lofty hall crammed with masterpieces, one of them contemptuously remarked, “ Are these your greatest pictures ? I cannot see much in them.” The guide replied, “ Sir, these pictures are not on trial. Their worth has been decided long ago. It is you who are being tried.” That is somehow what one comes to feel in the presence of Jesus. We begin to read the Gospels to find out what we think of them, and before long we are asking what they think of us. We examine the figure of Jesus to find out where we will place Him, and before long the thing we want to know is where He places us. Thus, bit by bit, pride is broken and selfishness condemned ; our fancied goodness is seen to be worthless, our best efforts

as nothing, and mere money, ambition, reputation, become trivialities. New desires begin to awaken, new thoughts of success in life begin to form themselves in our minds. We long to follow Him, to be like Him. Then, as we get nearer, the conviction dawns that this is beyond us. We cannot reach even near to this perfection of loving; we cannot escape from ourselves enough. This love will ever be beyond us. In the perfection of it we are reduced to impotence. And it seems as if there were no more to be said, though we know that without it we are in hell—the real hell of the loveless heart.

But, strange as it may seem, it is just here, in that despair, that Christ reaches us. For when we have come to this point of helplessness, we make the discovery that He loves us just as we are, that He has a place for us in His service. Just as we are, He calls us into it with the assurance that He will stand by us and see us through. If we examine the experience of the great saints we shall discover that the change always came to them through their despair, a helplessness in which they realised that only Christ could save them, and they were ready to let Him do it. It was when St. Paul lay defeated and helpless in Damascus that the call came to him to become the Apostle

to the heathen. It was when Augustine had given up trying to break his chain, and had discovered his utter impotence and the horror of it, that the light of love shone into his heart. When we are quiet enough and lowly enough to hear Christ speak, it is then that His love is able to break in and to possess us. And by that possession we are changed. "Not of the works of righteousness that we have done, but of His mercy He saves us." "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation."

#### IV

This experience makes a new world. "Old things are passed away, all things become new." The trouble with us is that in our self-centred outlook we do not see the real world. Very few of us are conscious of things as they are, so blinded are we by illusion, by pride, by selfishness. Neither things nor people are able to show their true face to us. A psychologist says that most people go about the world half-conscious—that is, only half-alive to reality. Only one person was fully conscious—Jesus Christ. And when we see Christ, His love tears away the veils; there is a new look about everything. The old prizes of life, as we thought them, lose their glamour; wealth and position



are no longer in the first place. The false standard by which we have judged people and given them the cold shoulder on the one hand, or too much respect on the other, are gone. "Old things are passed away." We see people as they are; see their temptations, their struggles, their needs, in a great charity that pities and longs to serve them;

Only like souls we see the folk thereunder,  
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings.

The chance to help someone, that was once a nuisance, now becomes a cherished privilege; the need that was once a burden a yoke which we joyfully share with Christ. The call to service that was a troublesome spur to conscience becomes the joyful music of His voice. We see people with new eyes, as the children of God, our brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. It is a new world, all through, to which Christ brings us; and only the changed heart can enter and live in it.

That is why the Sermon on the Mount sounds such impossible doctrine to the man who is looking at it from the outside. "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Judge not that ye be not judged. If any man compel thee to go a mile with him, go with him twain." What a world it is! Its glistening peaks seem

to shine with such impossible splendour and such cold, hard perfection, that men look at it and pass it by. But it was Christ's description of the kind of life that would be lived by those whose hearts had been won by Him and changed from selfishness and pride to Christ-likeness. It is not easy, indeed, for these. It demands a constant expulsion of self by love ; a constant fellowship with Him in which pride is broken and hardness softened, and the eyes kept open to God, who meets us everywhere. But it is the way of life in the new world which Christ makes possible and into which He brings us.

And it is only by people with this changed heart that Christ's kind of civilisation is going to be brought in. The unregenerate world in which we live demands for success in it such qualities as love of power, the spirit of gain, the hardness that is steeled against the sufferings of others, the self-centred, aggressive nature that refuses to let anyone stand in our way : these are the qualities that win success in the world that now is. And so long as these qualities hold sway, so long will it remain what competition, pride, and selfishness have made it. Under whatever system of government, the world can be no better, no sweeter, no cleaner than the hearts of the people who run it. The

aggressive, self-centred spirit, either of the classes or the masses, will never make it new, It is the new humanity which will make the new world, and Christ came to make both new.

We began by asking what is a Christian, and we are left with the question whether in the light of Paul's definition, *we* are Christian. In the face of that love and what it demands of us, are we being saved? Are we finding our way into the Kingdom which is entered by the heart made new—the heart which is broken by penitence and healed by that love? Have we seen Him, dying in oneness with humanity to live in oneness with those who let Him in? Do not let us imagine that this is unnatural. "All real human persons long to give themselves away to something, if not to someone." The secret curse of most lives is bondage to self. The only thing that can really satisfy a human being is an object of devotion not himself, for which he can give himself to the uttermost. That is the power of Jesus—the power of drawing us out of ourselves into the fellowship in which we find our true freedom through His mastery. And everyone may find it. Sometimes on the ocean there is a fog that chills the air and darkens everything, and all the pulses of the ship beat slow as she gropes along. But overhead, beyond the fog, the sun

is shining, and, if only she press onward, sudden or slow the light will break that chases all the shadows and brings the real world. The experience of Christ is like that. There may be a fog about our spirit and a darkness in which we cannot see. But if we press on and seek, with our faces towards Him, suddenly or slowly, there will come the revelation that makes all things new.

## THE TRUE INVESTMENT

LUKE xvi.—“ And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely : for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness ; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

THIS parable has probably caused more discussion and perplexity than any other. One of the early critics of the Christian faith made use of it to prove that Christianity was subversive of morality. But its key is, of course, the well-known precept that we must not stretch the point of a parable beyond the range Christ meant it to cover. There are some of His stories, indeed, in which every phrase, every turn of the sentence has its shaft of insight into life. The story of the Prodigal Son is like this, for every clause of it glows with meaning ; its very twilights are luminous. But in this parable there is only one point, and we must not go beyond it or we are lost in confusion.

This unjust steward was a very familiar figure in Palestine. He was a kind of factor who managed his master's estate, and it was a normal thing for such men to make a bit for

themselves by overcharging. He had probably a big secret commission—a thing not unknown in our own day ; but the master became suspicious and demanded a statement of account. The steward realised that the game was up, and that he could not avoid dismissal. What was he to do ? He sat down to think, and the plan suggested itself to make friends with his master's creditors. This plan he carried out ; not, as it might seem, by further cheating, but by the simple process of writing off his own secret commission. It was probably the one honest transaction of his career. He wisely used his secret commission to buy friendship. The master commended the unjust steward, says Jesus, because he had done a prudent thing. He commended him, as Dr. Moffatt translates it, for "looking ahead." Here is a man who gave up a present gain for a future advantage, and that is the point on which Jesus lays emphasis. He does not commend the man's dishonesty, but the man's prudence ; and it is perfectly possible to do the one without the other. Most people who are sincere with themselves have a secret admiration for the skilful burglar, though they do not commend either his practice or his character. What they admire are his dexterity, his bravery, his scorn of risk. It is quite possible to admire



the politician's cleverness, and his audacity may even make us hold our breath, although we may loathe his trickery. The man of the world may, as Jesus suggests, often show finer qualities in his own sphere than the children of light. Look at the dash, the daring, the generosity of some people who fling their lives away on pleasure, and even on sin. Look at the spirit of adventure which distinguishes many a gambler; the concentration that many men show in the pursuit of ambition or worldly gain; the wholeheartedness with which some people sin. They know the awful cost of it, but, in spite of that, there is no selfish niggardliness in the way they waste their lives. Someone points out that the thing which captivates us about some attractive sinners is just their abandon, their very self-forgetfulness. What makes some earnest people unattractive "in the green apple stage of their development," says a writer, "is because they are so hard and self-conscious; there is something mathematical about their loyalty; there is no splendour of creative freedom about their life." Is there not something in the charge that a good deal of respectability may just be disguised meanness, masked self-interest. Is it not true that some people are far too selfish, too self-centred, to fling away their lives on enjoyment, far too

self-regarding to go to the devil. There is much in what Browning says, when he condemns the cowardice and laziness of the man who is afraid to be anything with all his might.

And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost,  
Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin ;  
Though the end in sight were a vice, I ween.

If only in the Kingdom of God we had half the spirit of adventure, took half the risk, and showed half the abandon of some of the people we call worldly, Jesus might take the hearts of men by storm. This is the kind of thing He is pointing out. We will never bring in the Kingdom until we are ready to show the same spirit of enterprise as does many a commercial man, or even as does the gambler in the pursuit of gain, or the prodigal seeking pleasure. “The children of this generation are wiser than the children of light” ; and Christ’s point is that we should enlist the qualities of the man of the world, in the service of the Kingdom which is not of this world. “I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness ; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

## I

There are two things clear about the man of this story. In the first place he looked ahead. ✓

He had been living in one world and he found he had to leave it, so he began to win a footing in the world to which he was going. He began to provide for the future by the possessions of the present. He began, in other words, to make investment. That is what a business man does ; he lives and prospers by investing his money. He is ready to take long chances and wait for far-off returns. He will spend his capital to-day for results which may take years to realise. Sound business is essentially an enterprise of faith ; like faith, it is an investment. Hoarded money does not grow ; it might even be worth but little if there were not a host of people risking theirs and keeping its value alive. If the farmers decided to live upon their seed corn or store it up, there would be no harvest, and finally universal death.

~~xx~~ Investment of some kind is the law of life. This is used by Christ with effect as an illustration, again and again. Think of the parable of the talents. Each man had his portion, but was required to risk it, to invest it. The one man who was condemned at the end was the man who had hoarded it. There is parable after parable in Christ's teaching connected with sowing. The Kingdom of Heaven is as a man casting seed into the ground. Giving is living ; to hoard is to die. To keep our lives

✓✓✓ to ourselves is to commit them to atrophy. "He that saveth his life shall lose it." The spiritual man must be an investor. That is Christ's view as to how life should be spent. Our strength, our money, our time, our full effective manhood, is to be used, to be flung away, as it may seem, on something that may not produce an immediate return. Every man starts with a certain capital—his gifts, his leisure his brains, his possessions. The great question is, how are we investing it? Are we investing it to yield spiritual treasure? Are we exchanging our capital, our lives, into the coin of the spiritual country? There is a phrase which is best translated "Be ye good money-changers." If we are going to another country to live, we have to change our money into the coinage of the country to which we are going, or we shall starve. There is a country, says Jesus, in which the money of this world or the materials of its life will not go far. It is the spiritual Kingdom into which He introduces us, and for which we are here to train. The prudent man will invest his life in the treasure of that spiritual country, just as a man who, going to France, buys francs. If we propose to live in the spiritual world and to become its citizens, we will need to invest our lives in what will produce its wealth. Life passes, our

*China*

money is spent, our strength fades, our days go by. What are we sinking them in?

This may suggest to our minds the old-fashioned doctrine about life as preparation for death; but Jesus was not concerned with that kind of death. For Him, physical death was only an incident. The real death is the death of the spirit, which is selfishness; and it may happen to us even while we are physically alive. What we call death, He called entering into life. Some people do not believe in immortality or any kind of future life; but that is far too easy a creed. The eternal world for Jesus was a very serious fact, because it was the only world that was fully real. He lived in it even on earth, and death for him was merely the change by which we are ushered into life in its fullest measure. It is a realm where the demands on us will be greater, where the opportunities of service will be larger, where love is the medium of exchange, where righteousness is the law of life, where graciousness of character is true beauty, where the power of service is the real wealth. What are we doing to fit ourselves for this new world? We may scorn this way of looking ahead as a kind of selfishness, and it has often been so. There are people for whom religion is no more than a way to escape from the fears of their own

hearts that attack them as they look into the future. For Jesus, it was never that. Religion is a preparation for life. It is not a way of escape from the fear of death, but a way of equipment for the demands of life. Religion is contact with the centre of reality, and it is no more selfish to prepare for that new world, than it is selfish for a boy to look ahead and prepare at school for the day when he will be a man ; or for a business man to prepare for the day when he will be called to face larger responsibilities ; or for a man who is going to the Colonies to prepare for the pioneer work which awaits him there ; or for those who are going to climb Mount Everest to prepare for the perils and difficulties of life at these high altitudes. How are we investing our lives ?

The glories of our birth and state  
 Are shadows, not substantial things ;  
 There is no armour against fate ;  
 Death lays his icy hand on kings.  
 Only the actions of the just  
 Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

Are we living for the Kingdom that shall endure, or only for one that shall pass away ? Are we putting our money on what is, after all, a sinking ship, even though it look very substantial ? Are we living in the material



world itself, or in the world that is shaping itself within the material as a kernel grows within the husk which is one day going to break and set it free?

## II

There is a further suggestion here. Christ not only bids us look ahead and invest our lives in spiritual treasure, but He gives us, also, a hint of what that treasure is. It is the treasure of friendship. "Make to yourselves friends." So long as this rogue held his position, the friendship of these people who were in his power was of little value to him; he did not need them. Friendship was a quality which might have produced complications and interfered with his exactions; it is very difficult to be hard on a friend. Some people would find friendship in industrial relationship a distinct embarrassment. But this man saw that, out in the cold world, the only thing he could count on was the friendship of these people, so he invested money accordingly.

Did not Jesus mean this, that the real treasure of the Kingdom is the treasure of personal relationship? Love is the real wealth of life; and what we can do to create love in the world and promote these ties which bind man to man, by which our lives are redeemed and become

redeeming, is the true way of spiritual investment. Invest your lives, then, in what makes for friendship. Fellowship with others is the thing that endures. Whatever brings us together in love, that is what lasts—the living structure that abides when the temporary scaffolding of mere business and social contact has passed away.

It is easy enough to see the force of this if we think of one or two illustrations. One man gives his life to build a great business and then dies. He made few real contacts with his fellows ; no one misses the grasp of his hand ; no life is really poor for his going. What does he leave behind him ? A fine piece of organisation, but at the best only a shell. He has invested his life in things, not in humanity. But here is another, who in his business, in which he may not be less diligent, thinks about men and women ; their interests, their good, their development ; and into all his dealings with them infuses the red blood of an active sympathy. Whatever of money or of efficient organisation he may leave behind him, he has found true treasure ; he has used his time and his strength for the making of fellowship ; he has increased the value of other lives, he has helped to root the spirit of love in the world—to make the world a family. A great business

man who died the other day began an address to his Association with the words, "The true function of modern business is the making of men." Jesus would go further, and say that the function of all social contacts is the creation of a society of friends. We are learning to-day that the true secret of success in business, as elsewhere, depends on the enriching of human values, on what makes for the construction of personality. It is coming home to us that all soulless work, work which treats men only as machines and never permits our sympathy to pass out through business contacts to kindle the sense of brotherhood, is a bad investment, even for the money we spend on it. We have often talked of love as a sentiment, and sometimes it stands for no more ; yet we are beginning to see that understanding and goodwill, are the very life-blood of successful industry. It may be that where the wheels are standing still to-day, it is, in part at least, because of the lack of what was once described as "hot air."

In a great book by Dr. Schweitzer—the philosopher and musician who became a doctor, in order that he might give his life to care for the natives in one of the most unhealthy parts of Africa—he asks the question, What is wrong with modern civilisation, and how can it be put

right? And he comes to the conclusion that the true motive of a new civilisation is what he calls reverence for life. It is the very message of Jesus. What makes for life is good, and lasts. What does not make for life, for fellowship, for the lifting of men and women out of misery and poverty into spiritual manhood, out of strife and loneliness into co-operative fellowship, is wasted, and works for death. This is a fact we are more and more coming to realise. "Make to yourselves friends," says Jesus.

There are many ways of doing it. Some people who have made fortunes in business are investing their surplus in universities and colleges, or giving large funds to hospitals. America has long led the way in this respect. Not long ago there died in Columbus, Ohio, a negro who kept a shoe-shine stand. He was a man of education, who at one time was asked to become secretary to Booker Washington, but he refused, and to the end of his days he was content to run his shoe-shine stand. The reason, it appeared, was that the profits of this stand were used all the time to keep six negro boys at school or college. He calculated that the profits ought to do this; and it was the only object for which he ran the business. And the writer who tells the story asks the question

whether, "when the business accounts of that city are audited in the light of the Kingdom of God, it will not be found that the most successful enterprise was a shoe-shine stand?"

There are many ways in which we can invest our lives in human treasure. If our work does not give us opportunity, we can invest our leisure. A man whom I know is hard at work all day, but at night, when he is free, he has three or four boys from the slum district into his home, not preaching to them, but just loving them, making them happy, giving them an atmosphere in which they can develop. That is one method of investing in friendship. There are social agencies of all sorts in which we can take an interest. The whole movement towards social reform, better housing, better conditions, is part of this spirit of reverence for life. The creation of fellowship by international sympathy is another. The promotion of goodwill by a new outlook and attitude in industry is another. The work of the Church both at home and abroad, with all its opportunities for contacts with people, is another method of investing our life in making friends. As Schweitzer puts it, "Reverence for life does not allow me to appropriate my own happiness. At moments I should like to enjoy myself without a care, but it brings before me thoughts of the misery

I have seen or surmised. An uncomfortable doctrine prompts in whispered words, 'You are happy, therefore you are called on to give up much.' Whatever you have received more than others in health and talents, in ability and success, in harmonious surroundings, all this you must not take to yourself as a matter of course. In some way or other we must all live as men for men. Open your eyes and look for some man, or some work for the sake of men, which needs a little time and a little friendship, a little sympathy, a little sociability. Perhaps it is a lonely person, or an embittered person, or an inefficient person, to whom you can be of help. Who can reckon all the ways in which that priceless fund of redeeming impulse is capable of exploitation? Therefore search and see if there is some place in which you can invest your humanity." It is the very word of Jesus—"Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness." No man has any right to live merely for his business, for his art, for his profession, whatever it may be, as an end in itself. We do not fulfil ourselves till our life interest passes out into the lives of others, and somehow we propagate that life in us which is the life of God.

Think how Jesus spent his life. There are no limits to the career that might have been His



when we think of His amazing qualities. What popularity He was capable of winning for Himself! What marvellous powers of personal magnetism He had! It was a real tribute to Jesus that they wanted to take Him by force and make Him a King. But He was content to take twelve men, ordinary average men, and in quiet talks and in all the other traffic of friendship, to put Himself into them, to redeem their personality from drift and futility, to help them out of their faults, to show them how to build their nature around the new centre of loyalty to Him. He gave Himself to them, and was content to make that the investment of His life. To this same kind of task He calls us in various ways. What miserable satisfactions, in face of His life, are mere pleasure or the pride of big achievements. All that, without the love that makes other lives rich, is a kind of death in life, in which dust returns to dust. The life to which Christ calls us means sacrifice of leisure, of time, of money, of comfort. "For if you stop to be kind, you must often swerve from your path." But who will think of sacrifice in face of what the children of this generation fling away upon the things which perish? Who will think of sacrifice that looks at the Cross and what it meant for Jesus—and then at the Resurrection?

Somehow life has got to be spent. It is the greatest mistake to imagine that sacrifice is only demanded of the Christian man. In some way we all give life up. The real question is : are we burying it in a grave, or are we sowing it in a field in which it will spring up into life eternal ?

## THE CONQUEST OF FEAR

MARK iv.—“ Why are ye so fearful ? How is it ye have no faith ? ”

**A**S we read them, these words seem merely a gentle rebuke. The Master is chiding His pupils for getting into a panic ; but He is doing it with a smile. It is all due to their inexperience. They had been living in a world of terrors. Life was full of mystery, and the mystery of life is tinged with dread until we see that it is the mystery of love. The world around them was strangely cruel. Human life was very cheap. The very religion in which they had been brought up was a religion of fear. And, when the tempest swept down the lake and lashed the seas to foam around their boat, it was little wonder they should lose their nerve and begin to feel as if their Master did not care. How like the picture is to the world as many people see it—a tempest-ridden earth and a sleeping God, who does not seem to care ! And some folks in a time of trouble do exactly what the disciples did—they get into a panic of fear and say petulant things about God. Jesus rebukes both the panic and the petulance. “ Why are ye so fearful ? How is it ye have

no faith? ” Then He brought calm into their hearts, that calm which was the real essence of the miracle. For the real victory of Christ in such a world as this is not the stilling of the storm without ; it is the conquest of the storm within, whereby that without is mastered and overcome, and, it may be, done away. For surely one of the things we learn in life is that the key to any situation is the man within it. A part of the meaning of Christ’s miracles is this, that personalities like His—perfect in faith and love—are the key to the world we call nature, and to that mastery over its forces through which the world is transformed.

But do not these words of Christ carry an even deeper meaning? Is there not a real point in His question—“ Why are ye so full of fear? ” We look on fear as something inevitable—as one of the permanent emotions of life. We take it for granted ; we even seek to awaken it, and use it as a motive for keeping people on the right road. George Eliot quotes an old writer who put it thus : “ It is well that fear should sit as the guardian of the soul, else how should man learn to revere the right.” Many people appeal to fear in the training of children. They paint lurid pictures of the dreadful things which accompany wrong-doing ; they threaten various kinds of punishment. And society

does the same. Our whole prison system is frankly an appeal to fear. We punish people, imprison them, hang them, in order that they or others may be terrified into the straight road, and we imagine that thereby we are somehow following the method of God. The result is that there are many people who are quite content if they can avoid the consequences of wrongdoing, and with whom the only virtue consists in not being found out.

## I

To Jesus, fear was a disease, or, rather, the result of a disease. It was something which He came to sweep away, and to enable us to overcome. He was constantly saying to people, "Fear not!" It was part of the task of His Gospel to eradicate fear. There is only one thing, according to Him, which a man ought ever to fear, and that is not the consequences to himself of evil, but the spirit of evil itself. The only legitimate fear in a world which is ruled by God is the fear of the sin which stands between us and Him. Every other kind of fear is a disease—it means that something is wrong; and the first step to peace and happiness and right living is, in many cases, to find the right way to get rid of our fear.

Was Jesus not right in this? If we look below the surface of things, we shall see that fear is one of our worst enemies. How much of the evil of the world is directly traceable to it! There are physical troubles which, as we are now learning, are induced by fear. A well-known doctor, summing up, lately, the lessons of the last year's statistics of epidemic diseases, pointed out the enormous part which fear plays in these diseases, by laying people open to their attack. It weakens the resistance of the body; it lowers the vitality which is the best preventive. The man who is afraid of sickness is often the most likely to get it. He is by his fear weakening the armour of his constitution. The old wise man knew something about it. "A merry heart," he said, "doeth good like a medicine." A stout courage and a healthy mind may be a man's best life-preserver.

Think also of the struggle of life. How fear intensifies that, both for those who succeed and for those who fail! A pathetic fact in the case of some wealthy people is the number of those who at the end of life, when the mind is growing feeble, are obsessed by the idea that they are poor. Unconsciously they are revealing the secret motive which has been at the back of their struggle. It was the demand for security: they were dogged by fear. The same thing is



true of those who have nothing, and are on the outer edge of existence. Many who live from hand to mouth seem, it is true, to be less haunted by the fear of the future than others who are not so needy. But much of our industrial trouble is due to fear—the fear of harsh treatment, the fear of unemployment. Can men be expected to do their best, if all the time they feel that by doing their best to produce, they are cutting the ground from their own feet?

Or look still further afield. Is not fear one of the root causes of war? The real fact is that the nations are all afraid of one another. So armaments are piled up to give a sense of security, and this very attempt at security ends in war. Take away fear from the heart of the nations, and you will have got rid of the nervousness and touchiness which often lead to war. Till, somehow or other, fear is got rid of, there will be no straight dealing, no clear path to peace.

Most people have their own private fear. Some are afraid of suffering, some of poverty, some of nameless and intangible things whispering to their hearts like eerie voices in a dark forest. We are afraid of the future, afraid of one another, of what people will think, of the incalculable things they may do; and all this leads to unnaturalness and strain. Some people are afraid of failure, of the difficulty of new

things. Some are afraid of life itself—even afraid of God ; religion is something which to them casts a shadow, and awakens fear. We have still, in us all, dim primitive instincts, relics of the jungle, which Kipling describes, and we are ready to re-act to fear in suspicion and alarm.

On thy knees and draw thy bow ; bid the shrilling arrow go ;  
 In the empty mocking thicket plunge thy spear—  
 But thy hands are loosed and weak, and the blood has left  
 thy cheek—  
 It is fear, O little hunter, it is fear.

Jesus looked down into the hearts of men and saw the havoc this fear was playing with their peace and their character. The first thing the disciples had to do, if they were going to be of any use to Him, was to get rid of it. So long as fear dogs our path, so long as we are influenced by it, there will be no clear thinking, and no loyal walking in God's light. No man can be himself, or serve Christ fully, in a world like this till he has got rid of fear.

But we must find a right way to do this. For there is a wrong way. We may get rid of fear as some of the brave fellows did at the front during the war, simply by driving it underground, and going out to face unutterable things ; all the time holding it down like a prisoner, in case it should betray its presence. The result of that kind of

repression was that it was never overcome, never really conquered ; it was still there ready to start up again, and in many cases it did so even after the war was over, bringing with it mental and physical disaster. The only way to be rid of fear is to face the cause of it and deal with it at the root. That is the method of Jesus. Was it this, perhaps, He was thinking of when He put the question to His disciples—" Why are ye so fearful ? " Was He seeking to track their fears to their source, probing down to the germ of the trouble in their own hearts, like a surgeon with disease ? For fear, like many diseases, has its roots in some unhealthy way of thinking and of facing life. It comes from a mind which has not found its true relation to life and to God. " Why is it that ye are so fearful ? " He questioned.

## II

Then He goes on to add a second question—" How is it ye have no faith ? " The real root of fear, as anyone could suggest, is want of confidence, whether it be a panic on the Stock Exchange or a panic in the heart. The business world is built on credit, and credit is just confidence in others or in the prospects of trade. When confidence is shaken, fear awakes, and a well-established business may go to pieces in a

week. Our safety, as we go about the world, is largely based on confidence. We are not afraid even in situations where it seems possible we might be, because we trust one another and believe in the general goodwill which people have towards each other. And the root of any kind of real peace is confidence in God, even though that, for many people, only means a general feeling of goodwill at the back of things working for our good. We do not realise how much this confidence, this half-unconscious faith, does for us as we go through life. One thing at least Christianity has delivered us from, even though we do not realise it—the superstitious terror with which, as missionaries tell us, the heathen mind is haunted. It is worth while to live in a Christian country, if only to be delivered from that, and it was the message of God the Father that cleansed the air. Think of the kind of world pictured in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, a world like a blighted apple hanging in the sky. What a dark, drab world it is—a world in which, if this were the whole view, we simply could not lift up our heads, except by a miracle of courage. The secret of that sunless world comes out at the end of the book, in which we are told that "the President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess." If God were no more than a President of the

Immortals who makes sport with His creatures, there would be an end of confidence and peace. And there would be no hope of getting rid of fear except by getting rid of life ; or, as some people do, forgetting it, or pretending it is not there, or, what is most common, cultivating a hard heart and a tough skin. The real root of fearlessness is faith, the belief that God cares and loves, and is somehow keeping and guiding our lives.

But that raises a problem. How is it there are people who profess to believe in God, and in His love and care, and yet are often anxious and afraid? They have little of the serenity of the saints. They cannot stand in the face of life and say, " The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? " They have never reached, through their faith, that conquest of fear which Christ coveted for His disciples, and which His Gospel opens up. " Why are ye so fearful? " Christ would say to some of these. " How is it that ye have so little faith? "

The answer is found by going a little deeper, and asking what it means to have confidence in God. Does it mean a belief that God will keep us physically safe from harm, that He will step in to prevent us being overtaken by calamity from without? That is what many people imagine is meant by confidence in God. They believe that somehow God takes special care of

the bodies or of the businesses of those who trust Him. The facts of life are against this easy creed. Many people have trusted God in that sense, and the very thing they are afraid of has happened. Then there arises an uneasy feeling in their hearts, even while they profess to believe, that somehow their faith does not rest on very solid foundations. In a book of essays by a well-known writer there is a suggestion of this uneasiness. He is speaking of building our lives on something outside of ourselves, and he names one or two of the things to which people cling in a changeful world. "You can build your life around a friend," he says, "but that has its disadvantages, because friends die. Or you can build your life around humanity, but there again people are so ungrateful. Or you can build your life around God, but then," he goes on, "God, too, disappoints."

"God, too, disappoints." Is not that the unspoken thought which is at the bottom of many minds, though they would not give it utterance for a moment? They have trusted Him, and they have not found that He has done for them what they expected in the way of saving their life from the things they feared. And so their faith, although they still hold it, brings them no real confidence in the face of a storm-threatened world.



Now, of course, the reason of this instability is a wrong conception of what God is seeking to do for us. We imagine He is concerned with our comfort, when the real truth is that He is not out for anything so small. We imagine He is seeking to shield our bodies, when the very earth we dwell on, by the very make of it, is a place of earthquakes and tempests and other catastrophic things. The God whom Jesus bids us trust and call "Father," is not One who seeks to keep us safe and sheltered like children in a nursery. He is One who has made a world in which frost is needed as well as sunshine, in which the storm makes the trees take deeper root, in which suffering and sorrow have treasures of their own to bring to the spirit; and His own highest revelation was in Jesus Christ, who passed through Calvary and the grave to come forth in all the power of His victorious Spirit. The truth is, that God is not concerned for our comfort, but for our character; not for our physical immunity, but for our moral purity; not for our freedom from danger, but for our freedom from the poison of evil, poison which in its true nature is of the heart. He is seeking to make us what His children ought to be—kind, pure, loving, strong to meet evil and overcome it, compassionate to serve others with a sympathy which can only flow from some wound in our own

hearts. He is seeking to make us, in short, the kind of people who will be like Jesus Christ. And He has put us in a world where nothing really evil can happen to us except by our own consent, nothing can damage our spirit, nothing degrade our manhood or womanhood; and where, on the other hand, everything that happens, if we keep in touch with Him, open to the reach and guiding of His hand, will work for our good, and help us to be what He can make us by no other tools than these.

### III

We must enlarge our definition of faith: it is confidence in God, but more. *It is the confidence in God which at the same time consents to what He is seeking to make us.* Is not this the real root of many of our fears—that we are not aiming at what God wants? Is not our panic often due to the fact that we are seeking more to be kept from trouble than from sin, that we are out first of all for comfort and ease and security, and not first of all for character, for a right spirit, for truth and goodness—for all that Christ can inspire in us? And so, because we are set on something less than God wants to make us, the world is full of things that threaten us, and life becomes a struggle to find places of security—"funkholes," as our men used to call

them, of one kind and another, where we shall be sheltered from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." In other words, the deep root of fear is that we are in a wrong attitude to life and to God.

Take the fear of men. As we know it, it is the fear of losing their respect and esteem, or of incurring their blame or contempt, the fear of being unpopular. It is of little use trusting that God will restrain the ill-favour of men, or save us from whatever refined substitute there may be in these days for "the persecution of the saints." For the fear of men, when we get down to it, is due to something like pride, to a wrong desire to please people, to our way of making the respect of others the ground of our own peace, when the real ground is our value in the love of Jesus Christ. The early disciples, whom Jesus rebuked for their fear, and in whom the fear of men wrought such paralysing cowardice, when He was crucified, found the right way to get rid of it. They stood—they who had run away from Calvary—in the very midst of the same treacherous world, preaching their Gospel and defying the face of man. "Whether it be right, in the sight of God, to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye." They had found their true standing in the forgiving fellowship of Christ, and they cared nothing

for what people thought of them so long as they held, undimmed and unstained, the vision of that face which had shone upon them with forgiving and challenging love. The man who has found his standing in the mercy of Jesus Christ alone, because he has no other standing, and his peace in God's love because nothing else will give him peace, does not care for the threatenings or the disrespect of men.

When I survey the wondrous Cross  
On which the Prince of glory died . . .  
I pour contempt on all my pride.

In that lowly place we are delivered from the fear of men and all their disdain.

And the fear of life, the fear of to-morrow, of the new day, or the risk of the adventure to which duty or love may call us, the fear of all the width and wealth of life's experience, its heights and its depths, where does that fear come from, except that we are committed to purposes and schemes of our own, and *are not sure that our blessedness is in God's purpose and our true good in what He would make of us?* Have we really got the kind of confidence in God which consents to what He would make of us? If we saw that nothing can destroy His good purpose for us, and saw that purpose as the true good of life, is there anything that could make us afraid?

## IV

How is such faith found? How, but in the presence of Christ, where we come to value what He values, and to hold as dross the things for which many men toil and struggle, their days consumed by the fever of getting, and their sleep broken by the nightmare of losing. There, in the company of Christ, we see what God is striving to make us and what, through everything, and by means of everything, He will surely make us if we will let Him. There we learn to love that vision of truth and goodness better than all else. And it is that which delivers us from all fear.

It may be we object that that is a very spiritual outlook, something "too bright and good for human nature's daily food." We are but frail creatures, very dependent on such common things as bread and health. It is just these material needs which are the sensitive points, the joint in our armour where fear gets at us with its poisoned arrows. So long as we remain on this planet we cannot get away from these. The answer to that protest is very simple. There are certain needs which are inevitable. But are there not many others from which we can be delivered? Are there not many, so called, which are often artificially

created by a wrong ideal of life, which are not really needs at all, but only a foothold for fear and anxiety—a seed-plot for worries?

As for the rest, did not Christ promise that all these would be added if we seek the Kingdom first? And was He not right? The fact is these fears of ours intensify the selfish struggle and dry up for many other people the very sources of these material things, these essentials to our bodily life. This world is not a limited storehouse, in which the selfish way is the way of success: it is a living universe, in which the care of God works through every blade of grass and every grain of growing corn. And this living universe can only produce its best when men are working along with His loving Spirit for the things which He is seeking. We have never fully tried the spiritual way. But it is the message of Jesus that even the material resources of the earth will open their storehouse most fully to the magic of trust and faith. Let fear and selfishness operate, and it is like a man flinging handfuls of sand into a piece of delicate machinery, like a foul breath blowing over a growing field, poisoning the very soil. There is no man to whom the universe will respond, even in such things as health and daily bread, like the man who will face life without fear of losing these things because he has seen God and



seeks what God seeks. "All other things," says Jesus—the things about which we refuse to be afraid—"shall be added" unto him. "Why is it ye are so full of fear? How is it ye have no faith?" Track down fear and see what it springs from. It may be we will find, if we examine our hearts, what fear can often teach us, that we are afraid of the storm because we are not building our house upon a rock.

## THE CHRISTIAN SECRET OF ZEST

MATTHEW v.—“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under the foot of men.”

SOME phrases which Christ coined have passed into common speech, and “the salt of the earth” is one. We cannot pay a man a higher compliment than to call him that. What Christ meant by it, and what we ourselves mean by it, is difficult to define. It is one of those characteristics which we recognise when we meet them and yet find it very hard to describe. Yet it is very important to know what Christ meant. For He tells us that this is a quality His disciples ought to possess, a quality which is so important that, if they lose it, they lose that essential something which gives them their worth to men and to God. “If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?”

These words of Christ stir us to ask questions. Why is it that Christianity does not make more headway in the world? Why is it that it often seems so unattractive? Is it perhaps because our lives have lost this quality—that the salt has lost its savour? Do we

recognise ourselves in this picture? Could we, generally speaking, say of people who belong to the Christian community that they are the salt of the earth? Dr. L. P. Jacks some time ago wrote an article in which he deplored what he called "the lost radiance of Christianity." Is this what Christ means when He speaks of salt which has lost its savour? Let us look into the phrase and see if we can find its meaning.

When we think of the word salt in this connection, we generally think of its purifying power. It is an antiseptic. It keeps things from going bad; it saves from corruption. That is one of its uses. And we have taken the meaning of Jesus to be that Christians should be a kind of moral antiseptic, keeping the world from rottenness. "Men must have a religion," says Carlyle in his caustic way, "if only to save them the expense of salt." That is undoubtedly a part of our Lord's meaning, for that is one of the effects of vital Christianity. Real goodness, the goodness of Christ's quality, is purifying. It eats into the roots of moral corruption. It quickens conscience. It awakens shame. It is like a breath from the hills in a fetid atmosphere. And surely we may claim that, in this respect, it is working. What the world would be like to-day without the influence of those humble people who, in

workshops and homes and offices are radiating the spirit of pure thinking and clean love and sincere goodness, because in their hearts they have enshrined the name of Jesus, God only knows! You cannot measure that influence any more than you can measure the perfume of a flower or the value of a sunbeam. The world will never know its debt to these anonymous saints. In addition, they supply the one argument for Christianity which can never be denied—the quality of the Christ-like life. And Jesus was thinking of such when He spoke of His disciples as being the salt of the earth. “Do you know why it is that Christianity makes so little progress?” said a Chinaman once to an Englishman. “It is because so few of you are like Jesus Christ,” a thing worth thinking about, by the way, by those who complain of the meagre results of foreign missions.

## I

But that antiseptic quality is not the only value of salt. We use it to give a taste to our food, to save it from insipidity, to stimulate the palate, to give zest to the appetite. Does not this come nearer to what Christ meant? “Ye are the salt of the earth,” said Jesus. It is our business to carry into the world a zest for life; to give people a relish for existence;

to bear about with us the kind of mood and spirit which will make others feel that life is worth while ; to break into the world with a tonic quality of spirit which shall banish its dullness and listlessness, and help people to lift up their heads in the midst of depressing circumstances, and to go on. That kind of secret it is our part to communicate—the secret of zest, of interest, of vitality, of hope.

As Jesus looked round on His world, He saw that the besetting trouble with multitudes was their dejection. Life for thousands was deadly dull and uninspiring. It had lost its zest. Nothing new ever freshened the surprise of life. Morning after morning, the sky was grey and cloudy, and the whole air poisoned with weariness. They would have described themselves, to use the modern slang phrase, as being “fed up.” There are countless people like that. Mark Rutherford, in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, describes an old man in the workhouse a century ago. “He was a poor looking, half-fed creature, with the special workhouse bloodless aspect, just as if he had lived on nothing stronger than gruel and had never smelt fresh air. The old man's face, too, had nothing distinctive in it. He was neither selfish nor generous ; neither a liar nor truthful ; neither believed anything nor disbelieved

anything ; was neither good nor bad ; had no hope hereafter nor any doubt." He was just dull, and he knew it ; for, later on, when he was asked about his business, he described how it had slipped through his fingers. " I was always dull," he said ; " people like to be talked to and I got nothing to talk about, had nothing to say to any of them when they came in. The shop, too, ought to have been painted more often, and I ought to have had something in the window, but, as I say, I was always dull." That was his whole story. The fact is he had no relish for life, no taste to his existence. He was just dull. How many people are like that ! They are just dull. They have no interest in life, no zest, no heart for its difficulty. No trumpet challenge ever sends its music ringing in their ears. No glint of beauty ever freshens their blood. No vision of hope ever kindles their eyes, and so life passes by. They spend their days in a constant state of half-conscious boredom. How much vice or riotous excitement is due to nothing but this dullness ! Look at the world to-day, with its shrieking posters, its loud advertisements, its glaring decorations, all making constant appeal to jaded people. What does it speak of but just the dullness of men's lives. How many pleasures are a refuge from dullness ! How



many music-halls are just monuments to the insipidity of life! It is all an effort to find, outside of us, the source of a joy we cannot find within. The daughter of the late Mrs. W. E. Gladstone wrote of her mother, "Being so happy, she could afford to be serious." Some people cannot afford to be serious, for the moment they are serious they come face to face with the spectre of their own unhappiness. Unless we have the secret of happiness within we cannot afford to look into the face of serious things and tackle them, and into the heart of difficulties and meet them. The trouble with many people, in spite of their apparent jollity, is that life at its core is just tasteless and insipid. They have no hope of a future life, because they have no use for this. They have no fear of death, because they have lost the zest for life. They are just dull.

And Jesus said to His disciples: Your business is to be the salt of the earth, to carry into the midst of its dullness and insipidity a new interest in life, a zest for its experiences, a new spring of vitality which shall set people asking big questions, and make them feel that life is worth while. Is there anything better that any man can do for his generation than to communicate the true secret of zest. How many Christian people are like the salt of the

earth in this sense? How many are there, on the other hand, of whom that is the last thing that would be said? How many of whom this is the kind of impression they make?

The good, they are so wearisome  
Their very virtues pall.

People like that are failing at a point where Christ meant them to make their impact on the world. The first thing which Christ's disciples did was to banish the dullness of the world in which they lived. Things began to happen when they were about. People began to think and to dispute, they began to curse them, to stone them. Some said they were drunk. Others said they were mad. But, along with that, unhappy people began to find a new spring of joy. A new thrill came into their stagnant blood. New currents of hope were set flowing. With these Christians about, there was a blitheness as of people setting out on a great adventure that started the pulse beating. And when folk asked what it all meant, they discovered that these men had been with Jesus. That was all as Christ meant it to be. Have we lost the art of gladness, the sense of the "task of happiness," the power to kindle interest and awaken zest, to make people feel that life is worth while? If

we have lost that, we have also lost something of the Christian secret for ourselves.

Now what is it in Christianity that awakens the zest of life?

## II

In the first place, it gives us the consciousness that there is a big meaning in life. So many people cannot see any meaning at all in it. That is their trouble. They go through it all as if they were dummy figures in some weird and senseless stage play. How can anything have an interest for us if it has no meaning? Some people, of course, never think about life's meaning at all, never ask questions. They just drift, and all life's experiences are like water poured through a sieve, leaving a few dregs of sweet or bitter memory; and sometimes even the sweetness of the past turning to bitterness because it is so hopelessly past. Some people take up one of the keys to life that lie to their hand and try to use it, and because it does not open all the doors they throw it away and say hard things about life. They try the key called pleasure, and it fits one or two doors, and for a while it seems as if they had found the secret. But, by and by, they come to doors which that key will not open—the door of pain, that of sorrow, and that other of difficulty, and

they discover that pleasure cannot be the real meaning of a universe in which these things exist. Some try the key of personal ambition, and there are certain doors seems to fit. Certain difficulties it enables them to overcome, and even turn to their advantage. But let them meet with failure and disappointment, and they discover that, if personal ambition is the meaning of life, the biggest half of experience is for ever an unsolved enigma; for who can get the real heart of love or friendship if they meet it with the demand for pleasure, or seek in it their personal ambition? So there are people who have given up the effort to find a clue, and simply exist from day to day, like Rutherford's man in the workhouse. They may try to banish dullness in various artificial ways, but it is only making a little space of happiness here and there in a desert, and soon the old dullness settles over everything like a sand-drift.

It is here that Christianity steps in and reveals a meaning in life. We get it in the very beginning of the Bible story. There we see a picture of God making everything stage by stage; not a very correct picture according to strict science, but true in the basic fact that behind everything there is God—Someone with a mighty purpose and a heart of love; a creative Artist who builds a world which shall

be the materials of a home for men and women. These men and women are His children, and His next act is to shape them into a family, and to inspire them to take the crude earth into their hands, and turn it into a home. Into the garden He comes and walks with men, speaking to them through everything, challenging, guiding, comforting; enabling them, if they will have it so, to turn what looks like a curse into a blessing, and to take the burdens of life and change them into inspirations. But, in all that happens, He loves, He rules, He works. He has His plan and He will not give it up; and everyone of us has a place in it. We are not the playthings of chance. We are in the hands of our Father to such an extent that not even a sparrow falls, or a tree dies, but somehow it is within the shadow of His love. And through it all He is striving to bring in a Kingdom, in which brotherhood and service of one another, shall be the law of life; so that there is nothing in life to fear, nothing we may not meet with courage. If we cannot fully understand, it is not because there is no meaning in it. It is because the meaning in it is too big for us to see and grasp. Donald Hankey describes the experience of a soldier who lay wounded in No Man's Land. "Lying there on his back, he found himself wondering about

the meaning of everything. The stars seemed to make life so trivial, so petty. Eternity and infinity were pitiless and uncomprehending. Yet, after all, he thought, he had the advantage of them. For in his pigmy ineffectiveness he was of finer stuff than they. At least he could feel, suffer. There was that in him which was not in them, unless it was in everything. 'God!' he whispered, 'God in everything.' Then into his tired brain came the phrase 'Underneath are the everlasting arms.' " That is the underlying fact of life, the meaning that gives it zest.

Life has a meaning and we have a place in it. The universe is making for something. God has His purpose, and we are called to share it. As we think of that purpose in the light of Jesus Christ, it begins to take various shapes, and to glow with a winsome attractiveness. It concerns us personally, for one thing. It includes our character as individuals, the shaping of our mind and spirit, the control of our passions, the bringing to life in us of a spirit like that of Jesus. For that purpose we are called to live, to fight against sloth and slackness and discouragement, to stand up to difficulty and opposition and disappointment, and all the other things that once made us feel that life had nothing in it. We are called to a fight. The moment we see that, there is a new interest in life. For there is nothing



so interesting to people as a fight. The essence of all true sport is to pit oneself against another in a struggle that calls out all the mind and the muscle. Only, this fight to which God calls us is not against others, but for them, for an end that we can only achieve together. And Jesus came to people who were down and made them feel that life was a fight—"a real fight," as Professor James says, "in which something is won for the universe by our success, or lost by our failure."

As that purpose throws its light across the world, we see it touching other things, awaking other interests, giving rise to various kinds of social movements. Think of the spirit that started hospitals—that fight with disease and sickness. Think of the struggle against vice and injustice and war—those blots on God's universe. Think of the enterprise for which the Church stands, carrying the light of Christianity into places of ignorance and superstition—the fight that has love behind it.

Have we lost interest in life? The chances are we are shut up in ourselves. That is the root of much of the trouble for many. There is no one so dull in the world as ourself if we have to spend all the time in our own company, and never find escape into the needs and claims of others. Christ brings into life the big new vital

interest that can banish dullness—that of sympathy with others. The world would have died long ago of sheer stagnation and ennui if He had not come and opened up in men's hearts this new interest in the Kingdom of God, and in the human needs through which it is brought in. "Come, follow Me," said Jesus to the group of men standing beside their empty net, inert and weary, not because they had failed, but because their failure had made them conscious of the emptiness of life. "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. I will give you something to live for that will awaken all your interest and capture all your energy, and make your life so full, you will not know how to get it all into the years."

### III

But, again, Christianity gives zest to life because it has the secret of hope. Life has a meaning, and its meaning for us is a fight. And that fight is a fight which is going to be won. How many people have lost interest because they have lost hope—hope about themselves, hope about the world, hope about the future? We cannot live cheerfully without hope. How many people could get through to-day if there were no to-morrow and if, somehow, to-morrow did not hold some promise of good? We live by

anticipation. Is that an illusion? Some people say it is. Christianity says it is not, provided that our hearts are set on the right things. "Hope," said Paul, "maketh not ashamed." It is no illusion if it is born of the love of Christ. And Jesus goes to a man who is down, and bids him make a fight for it, and remember, the fight for character, in the long run, is a winning battle. It is the same with the fight for righteousness; it is a winning battle, if you look far enough ahead. "Be of good cheer—I have overcome the world." Or think of the assurance of immortality. How many people are hopeless about life just because they have lost hope in the future? "Let not your heart be troubled," said Jesus. "In My Father's house are many mansions." Death is not the end; it is only a doorway that opens on the beyond in the act of closing on the world that now is. How many people find their life hopelessly dull just because it is hopeless? There is nothing in it because there is nothing beyond it. It has no meaning, because it has no future. We need to reach out to the horizons of Jesus. That was one of the first points of the Christian offensive upon the degradation of life in the early days—its attack upon death, with its walls of savage despair. Life began to be filled with a splendid optimism for the men who had seen Jesus. They

could go on without fear. Pain was nothing. Trouble was a passing cloud. Life was a splendid gift. Even to die was part of the adventure of life—an expedition into the country of the spirit—a leap upon the breast of God. The whole perspective was changed because they had a background to this present world. “Our light affliction”—they could say even of unutterable things—“our light affliction worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen.” All they had to do and to face was a task from God, a trust to keep, a post to hold, a fight to win, and some day they would take it all and lay it down in triumph before the Great White Throne. The Book of Revelation may be difficult to understand, and we shall not understand it at all by trying to make its glowing pictures into a magical key to the details of present-day history. But the people who saw the world with eyes like its writer’s had a great stage—a gigantic background. They saw all things coming to a climax in which God was finally supreme, and so were saved from dullness. The reason why life has lost its zest for many people to-day is because it has become too trivial, too cheap; because its horizons are too narrow, its views too shallow. Their world is

not big enough for them to find God in it. It awakens no questions and stirs no spark of wonder. "When I consider the heavens," said the psalmist, "the work of Thy hands!" But many people have never even taken time to become conscious of the heavens. We need to find the perspective of Jesus, where an act of kindness has "cosmic importance," where our words and deeds, whether good or evil, are shaping destiny and registering themselves somewhere, for good or ill, upon the movement of God's purpose. We have got to get back and see life with the eyes of Jesus and drink of His spirit. "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

## HOW OFTEN SHALL I FORGIVE ?

MATTHEW xviii.—“ And Peter said to Him, Lord, if my brother sin against me, how often shall I forgive him ? Until seven times ? Jesus said, I say not unto you, Until seven times ; but, Until seventy times seven.”

THERE are many points in life where the way of Jesus clashes with our natural inclinations and prejudices. If it does not sometimes face us with some unwelcome challenge, it is time to examine our Christianity and find out whether it is real, or only a coloured or colourless imitation. The trouble with many people, as has been said, is that they are so deeply inoculated with a mild form of Christianity that they are proof against the real thing. One sometimes wonders whether we are not so familiar with the message of Jesus, so accustomed to pick out of it what is agreeable to us or comforting to our hearts, that we miss the staggering nature of the way Jesus proposes to us to take. And one of the points where His challenge comes right up against our natural inclinations is this demand for forgiveness.

In His talk just before Peter asked this question, Jesus was facing the problem of what we are to do with the man who has done us injury ; the man who breaks brotherhood in the



Church, for instance ; or he who from some habit or some irritable, selfish temper makes trouble in the home or falls out of friendship. Jesus says he is not to be left alone, much less to be cast out. He is to be sought out in love. He is to be pursued in the effort to make him see where he is wrong, so that he may be restored. In a word, the keynote of all our dealings with such people is to be that of constructive friendship. We are to take every means and go all lengths in patience and trouble to restore brotherly relations. " If thy brother sin against thee," says Jesus, " go and tell him his fault between him and thee." We are to be quite open about it with him, in love. We may find that what we imagine was a root of offence was baseless. " Most of the actions of other people which give us annoyance spring from causes that have nothing to do with the motives we assign to them." In any case, says Jesus, go and explain to him, quietly and frankly, where he has hurt you ; not with a view to getting an apology for your wounded pride and offended dignity, but for the sake of saving the man from the habit of weakness or selfishness which is spoiling his influence and poisoning his life. That is very simple. But if we think of it for two minutes, we will see what a difference there is between what Christ suggests and our usual

behaviour, when someone hurts or injures us. The usual way is to feel offended, and to show it; we hold our heads high; we pass our brother with a cold look, which is often the first intimation that anything is wrong. The result is that it is we who put ourselves out of fellowship and have to be restored by some sop to our hurt feelings—a thing which Jesus never contemplated. That way lies no hope.

## I

The first thing we have to make sure of when an injury is done is that our own hearts are free from the pride that takes offence. That is the first victory of the Christian spirit—the victory over ourselves. “No man,” says Emerson, “ever had a point of pride that was not injurious to him.” A man is of little use to the real cause of Jesus Christ or to His Church who has a touchy and easily offended spirit. Nothing so effectively darkens the windows of our soul against the love which might redeem both us and others.

The second thing He bids us do is to make what a well-known writer calls “an adventure in friendship”—to stretch out our hands to unlikely people, to unlikeable people, to unfriendly people, to people who are difficult, that

through our friendship we may win them to a better mind and link them on to the Christian fellowship. And among those adventures the most profitable may be with people who have deliberately broken friendship, or have fallen, through some sin or ugly habit, out of the Christian way. That method was His own. Look at His victories with people—they were all won by these adventures in friendship. He identified Himself with those who were outcast from society : time and again He ate and drank with publicans and sinners. Take the case of Zaccheus, a man whom everyone cold-shouldered—a social pariah wandering through the streets of Jericho like a lost dog, meeting only hard and icy glances from the respectable and religious, who should have been his friends. But when Jesus went to Jericho, where there were many homes that would have been open to Him—for He was still a popular figure—it was in the home of Zaccheus He chose to find a lodging, and received an amazing welcome. Then He won Zaccheus for the Kingdom of God. There are people on all sides who are waiting for the hand of this constructive friendship, and looking for it where they have a right to expect it—in people who belong to Jesus Christ. Do they always get it? A friend said to me that if he had done wrong and got into trouble, he would

far sooner take his trouble to a man who made no profession of Christianity—a man of the world—than to one who was known for his religious zeal. He would find there, he said, a judgment more human, more sympathetic and understanding, than within the ranks of the Christian Church. In his play *Escape*, where Mr. Galsworthy pictures a convict seeking shelter in various strange places, and among them in the home of two maiden sisters, it is the religious sister who wants to give him up to the police. One cannot think that that picture would be true in all cases—and there are other things that might be said. But it echoes a popular feeling. And it points to a danger—that a typical Christian of to-day would be so shocked by what the man had done that he would never see the man behind, with his aching heart and his tangle of miseries. The last position for a Christian man to take up to one who has done wrong is the attitude of cold aloofness or stern censoriousness. That only widens the breach and hardens the heart. It may even shut against the sinner the gates of the Divine forgiveness, by making it impossible for him to realise it in a living human contact ; for, in the hour of their souls' need, we mediate God to others whether we are aware of it or no. A friend once told me how she had gone to a girl

who had fallen, to make an adventure of friendship. After they had had a talk together, she said, "Now you can believe that God forgives you, can't you?" And the girl looked up and said, "How can I help believing that God forgives me when I see that you forgive me." "I have seen thy face," said Jacob to his brother Esau, when that brother whom he had defrauded had met him with such a magnanimous spirit—"I have seen thy face as it had been the face of God."

## II

This had been the drift of Christ's talk with His disciples. But just then Peter, who was nothing if not practical, put his question, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" How long are we to put up with people who go wrong, breaking brotherhood, falling and falling? How much are we to stand? Doubtless he had someone in his mind, someone who was a constant thorn in his flesh. For who has not? How long is this forgiveness to go on? "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?" "And Jesus said to him, I say not unto you, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven"—until times without number, until times without end. In other words, there is to be forgiveness to the uttermost. There is

to be no end to your forgivingness, says Jesus. The springs of your mercy are never to be allowed to fail. You are never to give people up, never to make such a break with them that they and you will not be able to get together again. You are always to keep the door open from your side, even though it may be shut from the other. It is staggering. We get into the way of thinking that if we give another person who has injured us one chance or two, perhaps a few more, we have done our best ; and we feel justified at that point of washing our hands of him and bolting the door. But see what Christ says. What does He mean? It is very simple. We are *never* to allow anything that another may have done either to us or to society, however deep the injury or however much it may be repeated, to stand in the way of our effort at constructive friendship. We are never to let anything block the pathway by which the love that redeems may flow into his life. We are to look on him as a soldier might look on a citadel held by barbarians, that had to be won however much it might cost in wounds or blood to bring it under the influence of civilisation ; though the weapons with which we fight to win this citadel are not the weapons of force or vengeance, but the weapons of love and patience—the weapons of a constructive



friendship. In other words, we are to find in our sinning brother a challenge to a redeeming task.

This counsel is not very palatable. The reason is partly because we do not understand it. Many people do not really realise what Christ means by forgiveness, though forgiveness is one of the key-words of the New Testament. The common idea is that it is the annulment of a debt or the cancelling of an account. Someone has done us an injury. We might justly pay him out ; but we refrain—*that*, we imagine, is forgiveness. We might take him to court ; but we agree not to prosecute—*that*, we think, is forgiveness. We find he has done us a bad turn in business ; we might retaliate in kind, but we forbear—*that*, we think, is forgiveness. He has brought us to shame ; and we will not take any active steps against him—and *that*, we think, is forgiveness. But that was not Christ's idea of forgiveness. It falls far, far short of it. It is far more than refusing to exact the penalty, more than wiping the slate on which his offence is chalked up. We ought not, in truth, to speak of forgiving the sin at all. The sin is done and cannot be undone.

The moving finger writes, and, having writ, moves on.  
Nor all thy piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

It is the man who is forgiven. Forgiveness is the effort to win the man who has offended us into fellowship. And forgiving the man means restoring him to friendship, turning the enemy into a friend, taking steps which shall bring him to change his mind, so that he will become our ally and not our foe—thus healing the break. If you take the story of the prodigal son as being Christ's picture of what forgiveness means, you will find that the father's attitude to his son goes much further than merely cancelling the past. There is, indeed, not a word said about the past. We cannot be sure that the past was cancelled ; so far as the son could put it right, he would have to do it, and would want to do it, when he had become right himself. But the father wants the son home—no longer a stranger, but a son ; no longer against him, but with him in everything. He wants fellowship, not the kind of cold neutrality of men who cry " Quits," but a loving bond. He wants to start those frozen springs of love and trust flowing again in the channels of his son's life.

That is what forgiveness means with Jesus—not the cold aloofness that refuses to punish or take revenge, but the warm effort of love to construct a friendship out of that estrangement. Such effort, said Jesus, must never cease. We must never allow any wrong which another

may do us to dry up the stream of love. We must never cease to seek to redeem, however much there may be to try our patience. We speak about forgiving people when they have repented. Jesus' way is to forgive people *in order that they may repent*. In fact, the word "forgiveness" is too poor a word. Jesus means so much more by it that He makes it almost a meaningless word. In this case Christ stretched the word to fit the loving spirit which He demands, till it broke in His hands. Until seventy times seven! *He* did not wait till men repented before He offered forgiveness. For in the very hour when they were putting Him to death on the Cross, amid their jeers and curses and the wounds of agony by which they were breaking His body, He prayed, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" And He meant it. His forgiving spirit flowed out to them, even there, in an effort of friendship into which there gathered His whole mind and heart. Nothing they had done to Him, or were doing, stemmed for one moment the stream of healing and redeeming love. Nay, their very blows only released in that heart of His, a deeper compassion for those who could thus crucify love—that love whose glory burns undimmed through all the centuries—still the greatest thing in all the world, so that we need only open

our hearts to its blaze to have it flood our nature and burn us clean of evil. And this forgiveness, He tells us, is God's way. Doth not He send His sun to shine on the evil as on the good? It is not because He is indifferent to evil. It is because nothing can stop His loving. Man tortures the earth with strife, and God sets to work even on the scars, to cover them with flowers and bring life and beauty into the place of ruin and death.

That undiscouraged love is what Jesus means by forgiveness. It is the spirit of constructive friendship that seeks to restore to fellowship, to bring love out of hatred and peace out of strife. Dr. Grenfell, in his reminiscences, tells a story from his early medical days which illustrates this spirit. A woman was brought into hospital dying of burns, caused through the drunken cruelty of her husband, who had thrown a lighted lamp at her. It was the climax of a long series of blows and insults. The police took him in charge, brought him to the hospital to see her, and tried to extract some word from her dying lips which would convict him of the crime. She looked at him steadily for a moment, and then, with what was almost her last breath, she whispered, "My God! It was an accident." Strict moralists might blame her. But it was love, still there, unconquered, bursting into a

final blaze to reach and win his heart. And surely there was a sense in which it was true. Like the Pharisees, he knew not what he did. Sir Frederick Treves, telling the same story says, "Her words expressed her faithfulness to the man who had called her wife, her forgiveness for his deeds of fiendish cruelty, and a mercy so magnificent as to be almost Divine." Love saw deeper than the sense of injury can see, saw the blind efforts he had made, the tragic forces working in his mind to twist it, and all the things that had poisoned his better nature. The more we see into the secrets of other lives, what strange hidden handicaps they have often had, the more we are content to leave judgment to God. It may be that some of the things which we call deliberate cruelty or selfishness are, in the sight of God, more like accidents than we realise. What the result was, Grenfell does not say—whether that flame of love had power enough to break through into the dark soul to burn it clean. If it is true, as Paul says, that love never faileth, that there is power in a love that "suffers all things and believeth all things," that is finally irresistible—then we can hope. Eternity will solve many of our baffling human problems, when the glamour of earth is broken and love has power to shine clear. Surely there are people, shackled on earth by

forces they know not, that heaven will release ; and love is the thing that will free them ; love that will " come full in play." " Love never faileth," even though, here, it may seem to fail. In any case, this is the redeeming way, the forgiveness that comes of a constructive friendship. " How many times shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him ? I say unto you, Until seventy times seven."

### III

But, of course, we must get a clear view of what this friendship means. Love is not sentimental weakness that is ready to pass over wrong, because it involves too much trouble to do anything else, or because it hates a disturbance. Love is valuing people for their spiritual worth, valuing them as the children of God. Love is, therefore, constructive of personality. And if love is to be constructive of personality, it must be ready to do what is truly best for the spirit. It may be best for the person who has wronged us to be brought even by stern ways to realise his sin. It may be best for him to suffer, to be brought up against hard facts. Something of a hurricane of indignation may be needed to dissipate a moral fog. It will be best for him to be faced up with the wrong



he has done and made to put it right. There is a real place in society for redemptive suffering—but that suffering will never, like much of the suffering which society now imposes, be vindictive. It will never be imposed as penalty ; it will always be redeeming. It will always have the criminal in view, not the sleek satisfaction of the community in the thought that he has got what he deserves. There is no conflict between love and justice. For justice means giving a man his due ; and a man's due, according to Jesus, is what he needs for his true life, in order to become a better man. It is always difficult to reach this point of view. We cannot help feeling happy when a wrong-doer has got into trouble, because we feel he has got what he deserves. But the difference between our point of view and that of Christ is this. It is generally ourselves we think about, our self-protection from such as he—hardly ever of the man who needs to be delivered from himself and won into a new respect for others which would make him proof against his own selfish impulses. It is always with the *man* that Christ is concerned—how he is to be won into a friendship which will save him.

The same thing is true of our complications with other nations. The day is past when we can be content with agreements that keep us

at different sides of a fence, absorbed in our own rights. When trouble is afoot we can no longer think first, or only, of our own rights, even when these have been infringed. The way of peace in a world like this can be found by no other way than by the way of constructive friendship that will suffer and be patient even against its own interests. Peace is never an agreement of brigands not to shoot each other. It is a league of friends for whom interest and fellow-feeling are so close that for one to hurt the other would be to hurt himself.

But for individuals or classes or nations to reach that attitude, it means suffering. The way of constructive friendship for Jesus was, in the end, the way of the Cross. It was the way of misunderstanding and trouble, and finally of wounds and death. Yet the way of love conquers, as we see in the case of Judas, and Paul, and the centurion at the Cross, and the dying thief. These were but the first fruits. And this world is only the sowing time. The harvest of love laid down lies mostly beyond. The way of love takes time. We have to wait. But the way of constructive friendship is the way that is secure. It is God's way with us. It is His redeeming love on which alone we rest our salvation. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." How gladly we say it! That is the

window by which we look out on a prospect of hope for ourselves, the light through which we find peace. But if this creed is to be real, it must mean for us more than God's forgiveness of ourselves, as His method. It must mean—I believe in the *forgiving* of sins. I believe in friendship; I believe in the way of redeeming love. I believe in the love that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, as the policy of men and nations. That was what Jesus meant when He taught us to pray: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive them that sin against us."

## THE REVELATION OF THE CROSS

JOHN viii.—“ When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He.”

IT is, in many ways, a tragic picture we get in this chapter—Christ is standing before a world which could see nothing in Him, and as He stands He pleads. What He is asking for is not an abstract recognition of His claim ; it is for something deeper ; for the insight into His nature and quality by which alone we can call Him the Son of God in any real meaning of the word. Christianity begins for us, and for all men, in an experience in which we see Jesus—penetrating beneath the surface to the love and truth that shine in His personality. Till we have seen Him with that inward eye, nothing in Christianity is clear, nothing is sure. When we have so seen Him, there is a new light on everything. As an old saint said, describing his conversion, “ It was as if, on a dark night, day suddenly broke.” The world of our day, like the world of His, falls into two parts : those who have seen Him and those who have not. That distinction cuts through all our ecclesiastical divisions and credal distinctions. It is not a matter of argument, it is a matter of experience ;

and it depends on our openness and sincerity with Him and with ourselves—as Jesus knew all the time He talked with these people. At the moment they could not see, because they had allowed themselves to be blinded by pride and false ideas, by selfishness and worldly wisdom, by all the other wrong things that rise, like mist, from our hearts to shut out the face of God. Many people are not humble enough, not free enough, not honest enough with themselves to see the glory of Jesus ; and Jesus knew it.

But a day was coming when they would see. The revelation would come through their own act ; for that same blindness would lead them, before long, to crucify Him, and then they would see. It was with that belief in His mind that He was facing Calvary. From their point of view it would be the hour of His final defeat. From His point of view, it would be the hour of His true victory. “ When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He.”

This helps to give us Christ’s own point of view about His death. The Cross, in His mind, would be the place of His supreme and victorious self-revelation. He faced it, not as the victim of a tragedy, but as the hero of a conflict, which, sooner or later, He knows He will win ; a conflict with the most desperate of all enemies

—human malice and pride, and all the blindness these can bring. And He was right. It was through His death that the quality of His life and spirit became clear. That is historical fact. It was after He had died that the full wonder of His spirit broke upon the minds of the disciples, and they realised that His fellowship was eternal. It was after He had died that three thousand people in Jerusalem fell upon their knees in quickened shame and adoration and called Him Lord. It was after He had died that His spirit broke into the proud heart of Saul, the persecuting Pharisee, and turned him into Paul, the Christian Apostle. His enemies put Him on a cross, and it became a throne.

## I

How did this revelation come about? For one thing, His death revealed the nature of their sin, their malice and their pride. How futile it all was ! It could kill the body ; that was its cheap triumph ; but, after that, there was nothing more that it could do. It could not kill the love that was in His heart ; it could not turn the blessing that He breathed into a curse ; and it came to them, and to the world after them, that malice and pride were defeated on the Cross because they could not conquer love.



That is the real defeat of the men who crucified Jesus. It was the fact that, when they had done their worst, they could not break His spirit, or make Him like themselves ; and His death, when all was over, brought that home. It is a curious thing that we do not often realise the full significance of some of our deeds until they are done. Passion blinds us and surrounds the tempting thing with a glamour of its own. We see it tricked out in false colours, and we are carried on to do what, at the moment, seems infinitely desirable. Then, when the deed is done, our eyes are opened ; we discover we have perpetrated a deadly thing : destroyed something beautiful ; defiled something sacred ; betrayed some trust ; smitten, as it were, the face of God. That is the point of Browning's poem on the effects of revenge. Passion had risen ; anger took command ; the blow was struck ; the enemy who was once a companion lay dead ; and then comes a light which shows how mean, how futile was the revenge that looked so sweet.

Now he lies in his rights of a man !  
Death has done all death can :  
Now he recks not, he heeds  
Nor his wrong, nor my vengeance.  
I would we were boys as of old,  
In the field by the fold :  
His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn,  
Were so easily borne !

So it happened with the Crucifixion. We have little record of it in the case of those who crucified Christ ; but there is Judas, who was blinded by some strange passion till his soul was twisted and the deed was done. Then it came home to him how base and mean a thing was his betrayal, and in the face of that unveiling he found it intolerable to live. And there were Joseph the rich man and Nicodemus the scholar, who had stood back from discipleship because they were afraid, and who saw in the light of that closing day, as His brave spirit passed away, what a miserable thing their fear had been, and would have given all they had to get Him back that they might stand by His side. Thus the Cross becomes the means of sin's unveiling. In the light of it, we see what pride and selfishness and mean ambition are, for when they have their way, they crucify the Son of God. All sin is of that nature. It is that in us all which helps to create the kind of world in which the Son of God cannot live. And so the Cross becomes the instrument of sin's defeat, and the means, for ever, of its dethronement in the soul of man.

O love of God ! O sin of man !  
 In this dread act, your strength is tried,  
 And victory remains with love.

And with that unveiling the way is clear for the second thing that happened : the revelation

of love, forgiving and redeeming. Love won its victory because, in the face of sin, it could suffer the last agony, and yet remain love. That is the actual fact, and that unconquerable love is the secret of Jesus. It is the very nature of His personality. To see that in Him is to see Him with the insight which awakens faith. It is to see in Him that which our hearts call God, and are thereby bowed down in wonder and worship. So it was with the centurion who commanded the execution party. As he looked on the ruin he had wrought, and saw love shining in a radiance of forgiveness and compassion he had never before seen, he said, "Truly this was the Son of God." "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He."

That is why again and again the mind of man turns to the Cross, to the death of Jesus. There the glory of Christ has the power to break upon us, and, in that penetration of our blindness, to win its victory over our hearts. There is some confusion here with many people. For some, the Cross is a sublime transaction which they cannot understand, in which something has been done for men beyond our power to fathom, yet which we try to express in a doctrine of atonement. But, whatever our theology nothing happens and nothing is done for us,

except in the measure in which we see Jesus, and see His love set free to conquer hatred and pride and selfishness within our hearts. There are others, again, who have no place for the death of Christ at all. They lay all the stress upon His life. William Watson, the poet, pictures the agonies of the Crucifixion, and then disposes of it :

What is to me this show of wounds and death ?  
 To me His death is nought, His life is all.  
 The one, no word of early import saith ;  
 The other, at morn and noon and evenfall,  
 Rallies me to Him like a trumpet call—  
 Him not of Calvary, but of Nazareth.

But there is confusion also here. It is not the wounds and death of which we chiefly think when we think of the Cross. They are not the things which hold us captive. That is the mistake men make in the figure on the crucifix. It gives a wrong impression, one not far short of the worship of defeat, and it evokes, maybe, only a subtle expression of self-pity. What the Cross reveals is the spirit that rose on it to a triumphant height of loving, and could have thus risen to that height no other way. It is the courage, the faith, the forgiving love there revealed that wins and saves us ; and the Cross becomes the means of that revelation, because it gave Jesus His opportunity to break through in one splendid act of sacrifice in which self was

forgotten and love was all in all ; and, in that act of love, to scatter our blindness, and capture our hearts in the depth of their need. There, on the Cross, the love shines out in a victory that we realise can reach the worst, and change the hardest heart ; and win us, amid our fears and weakness, to an eternal fellowship which death cannot break. So the Cross becomes the means of our entrance into a redeeming experience. “ When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He.”

## II

But may not these words have a still wider meaning ? Do not they suggest the one way in which we can keep alive in our hearts the redeeming conviction ? It is easy, standing before the Cross, to believe that love there won a victory. That is self-evident. It is easy, if we stand long enough, to become conscious of that love putting to shame the evil in our hearts, so that we “ pour contempt on all our pride.” But it is another thing so to keep the conviction that it becomes the fundamental principle of life, that the spirit we see there, transfigured in love and forgiveness, is the key to the meaning of life—the secret of true power, the way of real achievement. All that is

involved in the conviction that Jesus is Lord. For it is an empty creed to call Him that unless we can stand in the face of a world of evil and cruelty and selfish force and say that love is power ; that love is the very omnipotence of God. The world is so dominating, its forces so impressive, its appeal to our senses so attractive, that the face which looks down from the Cross upon our streets and council-chambers and battlefields is apt to fade like a dream, unless somehow we can gain the power to keep the vision. So His words take on another suggestion. We know that He is Lord only as we go on to lift up His spirit in daily life. We know that the love which was in Him is power only when we give it play in our lives.

Does not this explain why Christian conviction is often so weak, so hesitating, so riddled with doubts and questions? You remember Mr. Chesterton's reply to the statement that became popular at the time of the war—that Christianity had failed. He said that the actual truth was that it had been found difficult and not tried. Does not this mean that it is only when faith is tried in difficulties, when, in fact, it is tried out to the point of a Cross, that we become sure of its real power? For only thus do we realise that it succeeds. The Christians of the early days found it so. Is there not a



vital connection between their radiant faith in Christ and the kind of life they were ready to live? Where did Paul get his conviction that the Cross is "the power of God and the wisdom of God"? He had seen there something which wrought redeemingly in his own life. But more than that—he went out in the power of that love, into a world that denied it, and put it to the test in all kinds of ways, and discovered its might, and his conviction deepened into solid experience. When he faced his trial alone, and stood in the dark with no one with him, he might easily have given way to bitterness, but he sought to make that criminal's place an opportunity of revealing the spirit of Christ, and he could say, "The Lord stood by me." Others might argue and reason; he *knew*; because he had lifted up, in that hostile world, the Son of Man, the spirit of forgiving love.

The truth is that the spirit of the Cross is not only to be felt, it is to be lived. If we are to keep our convictions we must live them, and there are many occasions to give us opportunity.

There is, for instance, the way of love and sympathy with the suffering of others. What does it mean there to lift up the Son of Man but to escape from ourselves, in oneness with

the pain and need of our fellows. Think how Jesus dealt with the sickness and distress that met Him every day. It would have been so easy to turn aside, to have become absorbed in His own trouble, to shut away His heart ; but everywhere He went He lifted up the Son of Man. He bare their griefs and carried their sorrows ; He made them aware, through that sympathy of His, of a power which was able to heal and redeem. But there also He renewed His own inner conviction that He was the Son of God. Those who have doubts of the justice of the universe are seldom those who give themselves to suffer with others in love and kindness. They are generally the people who stand back and ask questions. They who give themselves, as He gave, make a great discovery. They discover in that love which takes them out of themselves a power which can save the world. They may not find the solution of the problem of evil, but they find something better : a fellowship with One who can redeem from evil and overcome it.

Think, too, of the way of love in forgiveness of others. That is where the way of the Cross opens up in most of us. The biggest challenge Christ threw out to the world is in the call to love our enemies, and He assures us that that kind of forgiving love is the true secret of

overcoming them, because it turns them into friends. It is just there that the challenge to the conviction that Christ is Lord comes home to us in practical life, but that conviction will never become a reality unless we try the way of love ; then we know. It may be that when we try that way we shall fail to begin with, as He failed ; it may be that external results at the moment will seem disappointing ; but there will come into our hearts a peace and a tenderness dissolving hatred and bitterness, in which we shall know that He is right. Sooner or later the victory is with love.

Does not the weakness of Christianity lie just here, in the life of to-day, that we are not ready to carry our convictions out to the point of suffering ? Think of international relations, for instance, in the way of peace and friendship. How far are we ready to act upon our convictions ? If we were ready to go any length along that road, as He did, would not that dissolve all fears and produce a new atmosphere, in which a new world would begin to awake ? When we have lifted up the Son of Man, then, and not till then, shall we know that He is Lord.

It is those who are willing to take the way of love which they have seen in Jesus, and follow it to the point of a Cross, who have the assurance that Christ is King. One thinks of David

Livingstone, moving through the jungle and meeting the barbarism of Africa with the words of the hymn singing in his soul :

Jesus, the very thought of Thee  
With sweetness fills my breast.

He describes how it gripped him, how it thrilled him and kindled his faith. But the truth is that he had won the power to sing it. Christ was exalted in his experience, because Christ was exalted in his obedience. He had no doubt that love was power, because he was living by it. He had no doubt that Christ would reign, because he was giving Him a throne in his own life—the only throne from which He could move the world, the throne of personal sacrifice, of service to the uttermost.

Is it not through such lives, and such love, that the world becomes aware of Christ's power? How are we going to get through the blindness of men's hearts, drugged as they are by passion and obsessed by force? The way through the things that blind men to the best is still Christ's way, by the penetrating power of love to the uttermost. Love that suffers long, and is kind ; love that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things—*that* marks the high road to Christ's victory. The world to-day fails to see Christ, and it fails to see Him because there is

often so little in our lives that carries the hall-mark of His spirit. It is still in the attitude of doubting Thomas, agonised because it cannot see, but dumbly asking for some sight of the print of the nails, of the marks of sacrifice, which are the badge of love. One thing only will bring the vision that can redeem. "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall they know that I am He."

## OUR SHARE OF HARDSHIPS

2 TIMOTHY ii.—“Take your share of hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”

THESE words come to us like the breath of an east wind on a languid day. There are moods when we all need this bracing message, for there are times in life when things are difficult. The world is not an easy place for a man who takes life seriously. The Christian way is hard. And we are tempted to resent it or to the malady of self-pity, and to wonder why life was not offered to us on pleasanter terms. It is then that this message strikes into our souls and sets us on our feet. “Take your share of hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”

### I

The first thing to notice is what Paul takes for granted about life. His underlying assumption is that it is a fight, and was meant to be so. His appeal to Timothy is to the fact that he is a soldier on campaign. He is not in this world on a holiday or a pleasure expedition. He is a soldier. And there are things one would expect from a soldier on campaign which one would never ask from a civilian on pleasure. A soldier



might be asked to take his turn at digging trenches, or doing route marches, or facing fatigue with cheerfulness, as part of his ordinary business, business from which he could not escape, and would be a slacker if he tried to do so. This is the kind of atmosphere in which Paul addresses Timothy. It is the message of one campaigner to another. That is Paul's fundamental assumption about life. It is a fight, a struggle, in which we are out to overcome something, to win something for the world in which we live and for the purpose of God. This is the atmosphere of the whole New Testament from start to finish, from the desert where Christ fought His temptations, through the Cross where He won His victory over hatred and malice, right on to the triumphant conclusion where we are told that God's servants, who have come through great tribulation, shall reign for ever and ever. That is the Christian view of life.

It is not only the Christian view of life. It is the view of life from every other serious point of view. For nothing is achieved save through some kind of struggle. We do not win an education without a fight. Some enjoy the fight with their own ignorance and stupidity. Some shirk it if they can ; but no man ever yet found his way into the world of real knowledge and developed his gifts of mind without a struggle.

The same thing is true even of the growth of our bodies. Strength comes through self-discipline through the enduring of hardship. The amount of really hard work that is done in any ordinary school gymnasium would drive a good many factories if it were applied to the machinery. It is the same with the winning of our livelihood. "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread." So runs the ancient dictum, and, though we are being told by the scientists that much of manual labour will one day be done by machinery, there is no getting round the fact that someone will at least have to make the machines. And that will mean taking a share of hardship. Tending a garden, or winning a football match, or cultivating the mind; it is all a fight. And half the fun would be gone from these if there were no fight. It is the struggle that gives zest to life. Professor James, the well-known psychologist, once wrote an address on the question whether life is worth living. It was directed in the main to pessimists who had lost for the moment the zest of life by fixing their eyes upon its troubles. He makes a great point of this—that life is a struggle and that it is that which makes it worth while. "It is a remarkable fact that sufferings and hardship do not as a rule seem to abate the love of life. They seem, on the contrary, to give it a keener zest.

Need and struggle are what inspire us ; the hour of triumph is what brings the void. Not the Jews of the captivity, but those of the days of Solomon's glory, are those from whom the pessimistic utterances in the Bible come."

And the Christian view is that life is a fight ; it is a fight with evil in ourselves, with habits of sloth and bad temper and selfishness. And, though we cannot conquer these merely by fighting them, but by understanding their roots and by finding a new purpose, a new service to which we can transfer the forces that bring the conflict, yet we cannot be rid of the evil in us without a fight. The light and the love that deliver us from the grip of temptation are the real secret of victory ; but we need at least the resolution to find the way of deliverance, and sometimes a grim battle to keep from the shadow of discouragement. " There is nothing," says Dr. Hadfield, " not psycho-analysis, nor even religion, which can exonerate a man from building up his strength of character by the exercise of will." In the *Pilgrim's Progress* the battle with Apollyon comes after Christian had found rest in the Church. One might have imagined it was all done with, when he laid down in that chamber called Peace, whose windows are open to the sunrising. But no ! He had still a giant to meet—a " foul fiend " ; and, though he fell

upon his knees, which is always the victorious way to fall, he had still a blow to strike with the help that came to him there.

The Christian view of life is that it is a fight with evil—that is one of its inescapable elements. There are always difficulties when a man is going uphill, and the Christian way through the world is a road up. God's world is yet in the making, and we are here to help Him make it. Creation is not finished, either in the world of nature or of human souls. And though love is the creative thing, creation is always a kind of struggle. It is a conquest of crude matter by the spirit of life, of a world in which evil has had a long start, by the spirit of love. It is this enterprise into which we are called—to help God perfect His creation, and to redeem it from the drift and selfishness that hinder His plan, and over which He means His will to triumph. It is to so great an adventure that we are called by Christ, and the terms of enlistment are that we strive as soldiers, not drift like holiday-makers or tourists out merely to seek the beauty or enjoy the pleasures of life. We are soldiers. On no other terms of taking life will we find any explanation of the hardships which it forces upon us and of the difficulties we have to meet with; not least of all when we are trying to make it a dance or a game.

## II

There are at least two kinds of people who need this reminder of the real meaning of life. There are, on the one hand, the pessimists—those who look on the dark side of things, and on nothing else. And here, again, I turn to Professor James. “Pessimism,” he says, “is essentially a religious disease. It springs from a religious demand for which at the moment there is no religious supply.” In other words, a man is a pessimist because in his heart he believes that life ought to be worth while, something good and brave and fine. It ought, he believes, to be that. Where did he get this faith but from the reflection within him of a truth—of the God of goodness and righteousness who lives in his soul, but who has not yet come to occupy his world. A good deal of pessimism, when it is sincere, could be lifted, if we realised that life was not meant to be without its difficulties and shadows, but that these things are there to be overcome, to be faced with God, and that in facing them there we shall discover His fellowship Who enables us to overcome them. For the God who is real, according to Jesus, and the God in whose fellowship we can find peace, is not One who saves us from struggle, but who comes to us through the struggle and who,

makes the struggle a means by which our hearts are kept soft and humble and sensitive to Him. He who takes life on the terms of a fight in which something is to be won for God and for His world—the terms of enlistment in the army of Christ—shall find peace, and the assurance that all is well.

The other sort of people who need this bracing message are those who are resentful at what they lose through this struggle with difficulty. They feel that life was meant to be joyous and free. There is so much to make us happy, so much to interest and delight us ; and, as their hearts reach out to find it, down comes this shadow of the Cross, with its call for resistance, for discipline, and, it may be, for walking a hard way. Some people feel this deeply in regard to the call of Christ and the claim of His way of life, and they chafe at it. It seems to cut right across the path of our “enjoying nature.” There is a stage in which we all envy the butterflies that live in the sunlight, amid the flowers of summer. Why should we not enjoy our little day before the winter comes and the night falls ? Why not dance and be free ? Does not this call to hardship and struggle mean the very denial of life ? The argument sounds very plausible, and some have listened to it, some are listening to it to-day, some even are preaching it. But, on



the whole, the happiness they find is not very satisfactory, for the call of something deeper and more serious comes breaking in, and no jazz music can shut it out.

And when their dance is over, there is a silence and a sadness which give their creed the lie. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." That is written all over the stories of modern literature, which reflect honestly, as true art must do, the experiences of people of this cult of licence and pleasure. The poet Swinburne once said that the world had "grown grey with the breath of Christ." That may have been true of a time when Christianity was identified with mere negatives and denials. But in these days there are many who would, as Canon Streeter says, testify that it is not Christ but Epicurus, the philosopher, whose god was pleasure, from whose breath the world grows grey. There are people who have tried the way of Christ, tried it for a little without really accepting the terms of enlistment in His service, and then have given it up and turned back again ; but they know in their hearts that they are missing the best.

She made a little shadow-hidden grave,  
The day faith died.  
Therein she laid it, heard the clod's sick fall,  
And smiled aside.  
"If less I ask," tear-blind, she mocked,  
"I may be less denied."

She set a rose to blossom in her hair,  
The day faith died.  
"Now glad," she said, "and free I go,  
And life is wide."  
But through long nights she stared into the dark,  
And knew she lied.

To quote Canon Streeter again, "Life, as a dance, is an entertainment that does not come off. But think of life, not as a dance, but as a battle; and wounds and weariness are what you should expect. They hurt, but do not dishearten. They may exhaust, but do not embitter."

But, further, the message of Christ about life must not be taken out of its context; and its context is the assurance of immortality. We cannot make true sense of this point of view unless we realise that He is calling us into a spiritual world where death is only an incident, a point of transition, a new beginning. We are here to find the spirit, and practise the art of true living—for a life which advances. And in that fellowship of God we shall discover, and know in its reality, all that we had to give up in the process of learning to live, in His great sense of the word. If life here is cut short, or limited through self-denial, there is the life beyond of which this is but a shadow. Into the fullness of that we enter by the strait gate of struggle, to find in its perfection all

that we have missed here—the substance, for which, at the call of Christ, we have forsworn the shadow. But, even here and now, the real fullness of life is with Him—a fullness and satisfaction beside which, the mere pleasure for which men deny their deeper selves is but a dead and withered thing. Life is a battle, but the battle, faced in the spirit of Christ, and with Him, is life in the truest sense of the word. “Wherefore,” says Paul, “take your share of hardships.”

### III

There are three simple things to be said in getting at the meaning of this demand.

The first is that we must *expect* our share of hardships. If we are out for anything really serious, we can be sure hardships will be there. If we are not finding them, if everything is always easy, we may begin to suspect that we are not getting into real grips with life, or doing anything really worth doing. And to expect hardships means that we are not to resent them when they come; nor are we to spend time wondering about the why and the wherefore of them. People who do this are like a man trying to make a key for a door which is already unlocked and can be entered by a little effort. It is wonderful how little Christ seemed to seek

the explanation of evil, how little to resent suffering, even the suffering of the world. The disciples came to Him for an explanation of a case of blindness. His answer was simple and short. "So far as we are concerned," He said, in effect, "the man is blind in order that we may cure him." It was the same with His own life. He did not worry about the reason of the Cross. There is no account of any mental struggle on His part with the perplexity of it. He expected it, He took it as the thing He had to meet, and, as soon as He was sure that this was the way for Him, He faced it without a quiver, and suffered such pain as none other has had to meet with a triumphant calm of spirit. Expect your share of hardships. It is the normal thing that we shall meet with them if we are going His way.

And the second thing is that we must *accept* our share of hardships. The secret of happiness is in the calm acceptance of our life from God. It is not that God sends our troubles. Some of them arise from the fact that life is not perfect and God's purpose still incomplete; that we are only on the way; and some of them from the fact that we and other people have missed the road, and the detour back to it is through some very difficult country. But, whatever the cause of it be, it is God's will that

when we meet hardship we should accept the situation. If we do, we shall find Him in it. And we shall find that, so far from losing anything, we are gaining something all the time. The great art of life is not in the circumventing of trouble ; it is in the management of it, to find how much we can get out of it for the sheer gain to the spirit, in ourselves and others. And there is no experience out of which we cannot win something. A writer tells of a woman who lay dying of cancer, and, where others would have found nothing but doom and calamity, she heard the call to courage and self-sacrifice. "She bore her pain with a radiance and a splendour that transmuted the whole quality of pain, so that it shone with the moral glory of the Cross. 'I wish,' she said, 'that I could gather into my pain all that the world must suffer through cancer and pay the whole debt as I go.' " There is an alchemy of love which can get to work through our faith and in our struggle that can change the crude stuff of adversity and difficulty into the pure gold of the spirit and the real equipment for service. But, whatever we do, let us accept the cup of life from God, whatever it hold, and that cup, however bitter, will become a sacrament, a blessing.

The third thing is that if we have not got our share, we must *find* it. We are all in the

boat of life together, and if we are not pulling our weight, if we are not playing our part in the adventure of life, the world is not going to get through. It is a cowardly doctrine that an easy and untroubled life, smoothed by prosperity, is a thing to be accepted by any honourable man without his making some solid contribution in return. For, to put it no higher than this—he would be living on charity as much as does the out-of-work who is “on the dole”—depending on other people to keep him in bread. If such a life be ours, we are bound in honour to do something that will help to carry the world’s load. What that something is, it is for us to discover—but some way of taking a share of the hardships which are the price of life and progress, we are bound to find. Some service we are bound to do. We can put love into the world in our daily contact with people. We can help to create fellowship, to think out the roots of our social trouble, and give ourselves to form a better mind and a clearer understanding. “I will not cease from mental strife,” wrote Blake. If the world does not need our manual labour, it needs other things. We can give it our sympathy, our courage, the gift of beauty, and self-denying personal service, through which some people are helped, and some are redeemed.



And are we not bound to take our share of the hardships of faith? People tell us the world to-day is on the down-grade. It is not the first time that has been said. But there are things that point to the loss of the old inspirations. Some are making a brave fight with evil, with vice, with the slackness and unbelief that sap the roots of moral conduct. What are we putting into that fight, into the fight for righteousness, for a warless world, for a new outlook, for a better understanding? If we are taking it all, taking the benefit of others' spirit, and others' faith, without giving our witness and our prayer, we are only adding to the mood of moral slackness and indifference which is poisoning the air to-day, choking the breath of life by which the world lives and moves. We are either lifters or leaners; we are either on the way or in the way.

Is not this the call of Christ, as we listen to Him, as He brings a burden and lays it on our shoulders? He calls us to a difficult kind of life. Of course He does! He challenges us to a fight with evil in ourselves, and in His world. Of course He does! That is what He came to do. But in that very call He is seeking to save us—to save us from drift, and stagnation, and ultimately death.

The Son of God goes forth to war;  
Who follows in His train?

## A SEARCHING QUESTION

MARK xiv.—“ And as they sat at meat with Him, Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with Me shall betray Me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one by one, Is it I? ”

THIS is one of the most dramatic moments in the story of Jesus. What a bomb Christ flung into the little group by this startling question ! They were a company of friends, gathered together for what was a farewell meal before He went out to face death. It was a moment when the feeling of loyalty would be strung up to the highest pitch. The one treasure these men possessed in all the world was their friendship with Jesus. The one gift life held was His love for them. They owed Him literally everything that made life worth while. He was going out to face, in a way they could not understand, unspeakable danger, for them as well as for the world. “ And as they sat at meat with Him, Jesus said to them, Verily I say unto you that one of you shall betray Me.” It was the last thing they had dreamed could ever happen.

The thing to notice is the effect of these words upon the disciples. Some of us, if we had been

there, might have cast doubts upon the information of Jesus. We would have said, "How can you tell? Surely you must be mistaken." But the disciples were too keenly aware of Christ's mysterious insight into their secret souls, to be in any doubt about His diagnosis. Jesus saw into the heart of Judas, for He could read the souls of men like an open book. Christ saw what Judas loved and what he hated, and therefore He knew what he would do. For our deeds are largely the fruit of our disposition. And so Jesus knew, and the disciples knew that He knew, and they accepted the fact. For Mark tells us they began to be sorrowful and to say, one by one, "Lord, is it I?"

## I

Now, that is a very striking reply. We would at least have expected them to be indignant, and to say, Who can it be? We would have expected them to doubt each other, to look this way and that, wondering which of their neighbours had this rotten spot in his heart. We would probably suspect everyone but ourselves. That is partly why the world is in the condition in which we find it to-day. We blame everyone, as a rule, except ourselves. We blame the politicians for not getting things done,

forgetting altogether the fact that governments can never move a single step beyond the level of the conscience of the community. We blame our leaders, especially those with whom we do not agree. We blame the class to which we do not belong. The workers blame the capitalists ; the capitalists blame the workers. We never think of asking how much there is in our own spirit that is wrong. We blame the Church for the want of interest in religion or for the world's attitude to Jesus. We never think of fixing some of the blame for the defects of the Church on our own faithlessness or slackness, or consider how much of the indifference to religion lies at the door of our own misrepresentation of Jesus. That is why one of the most popular ways of drawing a crowd is to denounce the sins of society. It is because we generally apply to other people the picture which the preacher is painting. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in the preface to some of those plays in which he throws the searchlight upon the iniquities of our social system, warns his readers not to try to fix the blame for these evils upon the villains of the play, as if they and their kind were the root of all the trouble, but to realise that everyone of us by his indifference or his selfishness is equally guilty. He finds he has to give that warning, lest his plays, instead of quickening

the conscience of his audience, should encourage the mood of the Pharisee, and send people away from the theatre saying, "I thank thee, Lord, that I am not as other men are—greedy and lustful and hard-hearted—even as these rogues and profiteers." Was not this the reason why Christ bade us not judge one another? The game is so fascinating that we may miss the root of the disease where we can begin to cure it, which is in ourselves. If the world is going to be set right, it will be by the people who will begin at home. It is the greatest tribute to the honesty of these disciples that, when He told them there was a traitor in the camp, they began to be sorrowful and to say, "Lord, is it I?"

What made them ask this question? One reason was that they were honestly out for the highest. They wanted to be right at heart. They had no desire to win a good reputation. They wanted a clean heart and a right spirit. Christ had taught them to value that first of all. He had taught them that to be right within is the real goodness. It is what we are at heart that matters: and, therefore, if there was anything wrong within—any secret laxness or spot of decay—they were ready to be told. If there was any weak strand in the rope that bound them to Christ, any hidden weakness,

however humiliating, they wanted it shown up. They knew that He would only wound in order to heal. Truth is always better than lies, even though it scalds and burns. It is a great thing when a man gets into that position with Christ. The one quality He demands is the quality of sincerity. We will get very little out of the New Testament if we only read to find in it what will flatter our own self-respect. Jesus Christ is a difficult Master to serve, a difficult friend to have. He will not hide the truth from us in order to save our feelings. Real Christianity begins with us when we are ready to walk in His light though it shatter every illusion we have about ourselves, and tear off every rag of pride that covers our nakedness. The place of all great beginnings is here :

Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.  
Naked, come to Thee for dress ;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.

And the disciples were in the place of true health when they asked one by one, " Lord, is it I ? "

But another reason for their question was that they were not really at peace in themselves. They were aware of dark things in them that had never been slain and conquered. They were conscious of fears and hates and passions which at any moment they felt might rise to



take them by the throat. That is not an uncommon position. Many a man goes through life conscious that he is carrying in his heart a slumbering volcano. When we are honest with ourselves we know that it is not always the love of God and the desire of righteousness that keeps us going straight. Sometimes it is the thought of public opinion, the fear of a shattered reputation. Is it merely a morbid feeling that sometimes visits us, when we read a story of crime and think of the poor chance some of these criminals had, compared with our own advantages—that, but for those angel hands stretched out to hold us, we too might have drifted down? There are things we would rather die than do; but sometimes we get uneasy reminders that the wrong desire is there; the hateful thought; the spark that, given the right conditions, might blaze into a devouring flame and lay our life in ruins. Many people are unpleasantly aware of these hidden things, and sometimes they rise to the surface and break their peace. One of the best of men, who did more for his day and generation than almost any other in the last half-century, refused to have his biography written till he was dead. He had seen, he said, too many men fall out in the last lap of the race, and sink miserably in some quicksand. Perhaps he was

morbid about it. But even Paul did not seem to be free from this shadow. "I bring under my body, lest, having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

There is something quite real and honest about this fear. The man who has a tinge of it in his heart is in the safest position. He knows the precipice and fears it, and therefore he keeps away from it. He keeps in the place of dependence on God.

Ah, yes ! all preciousness to mortal hearts  
Is guarded by a fear.  
All love fears loss, and most that loss supreme—  
Its own perfection.

It is a sign of progress when this fear becomes the dominant fear of life—the fear of growing blind to God's grace—the fear lest in the movement of God's purpose we should find ourselves, through any slackness or selfishness, among the unfit. So many of our fears are on the lower plane. We fear trouble and we want security from it. We fear the future and the mischances it may bring. We fear the hand of calamity and the havoc it may work in the quiet nest of our comfort and happiness. And we seek religion as a security from these fears. But there is a real place for fear, and a fear which is worthy—the fear not of suffering, but of sin ; not of calamity, but of the blindness that misses

God's call in it ; not of misfortune, but of that treachery of our own hearts that makes us fail in the hour of temptation. One of the first transformations Christ works is the transformation of our fears. " Fear not them which kill the body," He said. " I will tell you whom you should fear. Fear him—the spirit of evil, the tempting thing—which is able to cast both body and soul into hell." And it was this fear of hidden dark things, of base possibilities of evil which have in them the seed of infinite destruction, that made these disciples ask that question, " Lord, is it I ? "

## II

It was all honest and real. There is hope for a man when he gets into this position of absolute sincerity. He is at the beginning of victory and peace. He is in the position in which Christ can help him. You cannot do anything with a man till he is sincere, till he becomes conscious of himself and aware of his own nature. But he has to go further, of course, if he is to be healed and find true peace. For there is no real victory over evil merely in repression, in holding things down—the chained tiger and the captive ape. We have got to find a real harmony in which part of ourselves shall not

go on constantly fighting some other part, never quite sure which of the two, the devil or the saint, is going to win. How do we reach a real inward peace and victory and freedom?

In the first place, we must be open to ourselves and to God about what we feel are unworthy desires and passions. We must acknowledge them as part of ourselves. We must accept our nature and realise what is good and what is evil in it. There is a great deal of needless confusion and conflict in the minds of people, because they do not understand themselves. Some people look upon temptation in itself as wrong and evil. But if Christ was tempted, and we are assured that He was, temptation in itself cannot be wrong. All temptation comes of crude desires, of instincts which in themselves are a healthy and living part of our nature. We carry with us impulses which belong to the animal; they come of our primitive heritage. In themselves these are not wrong. It is the way in which we use them, or express them, which makes them right or wrong. It is not wrong for a man, for instance, to admire things and to desire to possess. But it is wrong if that desire to possess makes him want to steal from his neighbour, or satisfy it at the expense of others.

It is not wrong for a person to find it hard to get on with his neighbour. There are prejudices with which we are born, or which are part of our training. Temperaments, tastes, ambitions perhaps, may clash. But it is wrong if this clash of minds, these prejudices, make us hate other people or want to injure them, or prevent us trying to understand them. It is not wrong in itself to shrink from trouble or danger, though Christ can often deliver us from this fear. But it is wrong when this shrinking makes us run away from duty, or tell a lie, or fight for our own hand, or be false to a friend. These natural impulses, which are the root of all temptation and the energy of all sin, are a living part of our make-up and in themselves are healthy and right, and by the grace of God can become the energy of a strong character.

And the second thing, if we are on the verge of temptation, is to take a square look into the wrong way of life. What will it mean? What will it lead to? Think it out, calmly, in the light of Christ and of reality. What will this selfishness involve? What will it bring to the lives of others? Where will this hatred, this greed, this lust, land us? A man went one day to his minister with a cold sweat on his face. He said, "I have a relative who I know

intends to leave me some money. Lately I have caught myself wishing that he were dead, and it has just come to me that but for civilisation, I should be a murderer." No better service can be done for us than that of many poets and novelists in showing us, sometimes unwittingly, how selfishness works out and where passion leads, and how, in the long run, the wages of sin is death. We cannot read *The Forsyte Saga*, for instance, without praying to be delivered from the kind of world pictured there. Think out the wrong suggestion. Strip off its illusion, its false glamour, by looking the naked results of it full in the face. Christ was helping these disciples to do this when He used this word "betray." For what is all selfishness, all self-seeking, all following our own crude desire but the denial of God's loving purpose, treachery to that energy of love that made all things and strives to make them beautiful—the betrayal of the Son of God. What are all our sins against one another but a crucifying of the Son of God? That is part of the eternal power of the Cross. It stands there, for ever witnessing to the thing that selfishness and evil passion are always doing, whether we are conscious of it or not. And that is a thing which is in the nature of a crucifixion of the Son of God. When we see that, there is a



shudder in our souls which breaks the spell and fascination of the sin, and sets us free.

### III

But there is one step more. It is to be utterly open to the love which can win us and is able to capture all our nature, all the energy that might, else, be poured down some gutter of shame. And Christ can win our hearts if we are thus open to Him. That was the great secret of the victory of the disciples. They felt in that hour the heart-beat of His love. Even as He spoke to them of being betrayed by one of them, there was no bitterness in His tone, no threatening, no suggestion that if the dastardly plan were carried out, all would be over between Him and them. "One of you shall betray Me," He said. Then, a moment after, He took bread ; when He had broken it He said, " This is My body, broken for you." Think of it—and one of them was going to help to break it ! And, again, " This cup is the new covenant in My blood, shed for forgiveness "—and one of them was going to help shed it ! There is nothing in the whole range of human love more victoriously wonderful than that. And, as they listened, while their hearts were filled with fear and dispeace, there began to

take possession of them—though they did not realise the full power of it at the time—the wonder of a love that would not give them up, that would break forth even through their betrayals and turn the disaster and shame of them into fountains of redeeming.

And, later, they found it so—all of them. Even Judas was saved, for Judas saw, when the deed was over, what he had really done, and went out of his mind with the utter horror of that revelation of love denied. And there was Peter; he, too, betrayed Christ, and in spite of it He looked on Peter and saved him with the look. And the disciples betrayed Him, for they fled from the Cross, and turned their backs on Him. But, as they sat in the Upper Room, suddenly there came this Jesus, breaking into their hearts with a love that death could not destroy and that neither time nor space could confine. And that love saved them, won all their nature, took possession of them, changed them into saints and heroes—free, whole-hearted, and, because He reigned in their hearts, at peace. I do not suggest it happened in a moment, or without a struggle. It took a long time, but by degrees they found this love invading their lives, casting out one wrong thing after another, capturing their nature bit by bit. This love was like a fine

plant sending its roots through a jungle, ousting the weeds and taking the strength of the soil that once ran to poisonous growths into its own fine stems, to produce flowers and fragrance. It was not without a struggle, but *He was in the struggle*. And, amid it all, they found peace from their fears, and from the uneasy suggestions springing up from those yet unconquered places. They felt that He would see them through, that there was that in His love which would do it. This was their security, that *He* would see them through. The prize which attracts the Romanist is the shelter of an infallible Church. And the Protestants, when they rejected this, put in place of the assurance which it offered the doctrine that God will never change His will and purpose of love. But the shelter, the assurance, is all in the love of Christ when we see it and are open to it. The more we see Him, the surer we are that His love will be enough for anything, so long as we are open to it. And, knowing this, there broke upon the early Church the song of triumph, "Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever."

## THE SPIRITUAL BASIS OF SERVICE

MATTHEW x.—“Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, he shall not lose his reward.”

THIS verse is a kind of poor man's charter. It is the guarantee of his right to a place in the service of Christ. He may not be able to do much, or to give much, but at least he can give a cup of cold water, and feel that his deed will count in the eyes of Jesus. It has become the authority for that human service to others in their physical need, which for some people is the sum total of Christian living.

In the face of this word, and others like it, no one dare deny the value of social and philanthropic service. Christianity demands the service of men, through the needs of the body. It is in this kind of work that the Christian spirit finds its characteristic outlet. “A good man helping somebody,” healing somebody, feeding somebody, that is the kind of picture that reminds us of Jesus Christ. Sometimes this has been forgotten, and men have become absorbed in splendid worship or mystical piety, imagining that that is religion, and have had to be recalled to the fact that the service of

others is the true ritual of devotion and the vital means of fellowship with God. "Have ye not heard," said Jesus to the people of His time, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice?" and the Apostle John was very frank—"Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" We cannot get away from it. The real Christian is not he that "nameth the name, but he that doeth the will," and the will of Christ is plain. "Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, he shall not lose his reward."

## I

In the age in which we live there is not the same need, as once there was, to insist on this. The emphasis on practical Christianity has returned with force. It is a sound instinct that makes the broadcasting authorities send out, after the religious service on Sunday evening, an appeal for a hospital or some other charity. There never has been a time when the humanitarian interest was so strong. It is one of the ways in which the spirit of Christ is becoming vital in our day. The cup of cold

water has become a kind of popular religious cult.

But there is a danger in this emphasis. It is the danger lest social service should come to take the place of religion, and be divorced from the outlook and motive of religious faith. There are many motives of social service to-day, and not all of them of the highest. For some people, service to others, when we get to the root of it, is really a way of escape for themselves. We are living in an introspective age. Many people carry about with them continually, a half-conscious underworld of unrest and conflict. They are at war within themselves. They are racked by inner forces which they can neither understand nor harmonise. The other day one of our newspapers published some articles on failure in life ; and a correspondent wrote that, if only the clergy would give up preaching theology, and set themselves to help men to get inward peace, they would be doing a very real service to the community. A good deal of social service to which some people give themselves is a noble effort to find release from the conflict within.

Other people fall back upon such service as an escape from thought about the meaning of life, the enigmas of the universe in which we live. To them religion is full of perplexity. They



find it so difficult to see their way amid conflicting creeds and to discover a real basis of belief, that they attempt to solve the problem by throwing over the whole effort, cutting the knot, with the reflection that, after all, Christianity means helping other people. If we do all the good we can to our neighbour, we can let theology go, and allow the whole superstructure of religion, such as they imagine a creed to be, to take care of itself. It is the attraction of a creedless Christianity, a religion whose only ritual is good works ; but it is just an escape from thinking things out, from facing up to the question of faith.

✓ The result is that, for many, the service of men has become a substitute for religion. It is easy enough to argue for it ; to make stage capital or literary points out of the contrast between the worshipper who neglects the appeal for human service and the man who scorns the ✓ Church, but is generous, kind, and sympathetic.

✓ Yet the real truth is that the two things cannot be separated without loss to both. Without ✓ service, religion degenerates into unreality ; and without religion, service becomes materialistic. It cannot help in any final way the man it seeks to serve, and in the end it fails of its own vital impulse and motive.

The point to notice in our text is the actual

word of Jesus about the cup of cold water. He does not say that whosoever gives a cup of cold water to his fellows will have his reward. There is a phrase added which is significant ; the deed must be done in the name of a disciple. That phrase is important, for this is what it suggests—it is not merely the giving of the cup of cold water which is the helpful thing ; it is giving it in the name of a disciple—that is, as a writer remarks, “ in the name of something that is of cosmic importance.” In other words, it is giving the cup of cold water in a certain spirit, with a certain outlook and meaning—this, namely, that we and the man we are helping are brothers in a world where God is Father.

Perhaps we ask what difference this makes. Does it really matter what is in our minds about the man we are helping, so long as we help him ? What does the motive matter ? Here is a man who needs food, or is sick, or in financial trouble. What does it matter what we think about him, much less about the world in which we live, so long as we give him the practical help he wants ?

## II

But if we think this out, we will realise that it does make a difference. It makes, in the first place, a real difference to him. Who is this man to whom we give the cup of cold

*yellow  
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water? Is he only body, or is he also spirit? Is he merely an animal, spending his little life like a moth in the sunlight before the shadows fall? Will it not make a difference to him whether we feed him as we give a bone to a dog or in the spirit in which a man gives a gift to his brother? If he is spirit, how far can a mere cup of cold water, if it be that and nothing more, feed that spirit, and lift him from the dust where life has flung him? The moment we come to think of it, we realise that man's deepest need is within. It is not merely what ministers to his physical body that really helps him. It is the contact with a spiritual world which will lift him from despair and rescue him from loneliness, and will give him the sense that, with all his need and poverty, he counts for something infinitely precious in a world in which God is Father. In other words, what he needs is the communication of a faith by which he can live. Men need the satisfaction of a more profound hunger and thirst than that of the body—the cure of deeper wounds than that of the flesh. And for that they are seeking in the depths of their pain. “The most sensual and the meanest always manifest,” says Mark Rutherford, “an indisposition to be content with mere material satisfactions. It is the commentary on the text that man shall not

live by bread alone. It is evidence of a compulsion, of which art is the highest manifestation, to escape." In other words, men crave not only bread, but beauty; not only food, but friendship. Their real need is to be awakened to the reality of a spiritual world, by a living contact with it. Unless we can get that through in our physical ministrations, we are only supplying a material want. We may, indeed, in some cases only beget a sense of deeper loneliness and a darker feeling of inferiority. That is the reason why the help we give to some people sets up a curious kind of estrangement and irritation in their minds. We have, by our attitude, unconsciously tampered with their independence, and made them resentful of a world which regards them as outcasts to be patronised, instead of brothers to be welcomed into the family. The gift of a cup of cold water can restore the spirit if, through it, there shines some light of faith and love; if it be given, that is to say, in the name of a disciple, in the faith that God is Father, and that men are brothers.

For our service to the need of others, like everything else we do, is symbolic. It carries some meaning; it speaks some message. It may be the symbol of brotherhood or of patronage; it may be the expression of a real sympathy

or of a secret disdain. Our gifts must be sacramental of a real love, or they do not really touch the sore of human life. They must convey something of ourselves, of our own faith, or they miss the mark, and harden instead of lifting. They must aim at remaking the mind, while remaking the body. "Love," says Professor Hocking, "in Christianity, as in Plato, means the will to confer immortality; and, apart from that, the legacy of charity imposed upon our present social order begins to appear as a wretched substitute for justice, and a mockery of all honest love." Russell Lowell puts the point with true insight in the hackneyed poem "The Vision of Sir Launfall." The knight in his proud youth, with idealism flaming in his heart, goes out to seek the Holy Grail. On his way he meets a leper, to whom, with his head held high, he tosses a gold coin.

The leper raised not the gold from the dust :  
" Better to me the poor man's crust,  
Better the blessing of the poor,  
Though I turn me empty from his door " :  
That is no true alms which the hand can hold  
He gives nothing but worthless gold,  
Who gives from a sense of duty,  
But he who gives with all his might,  
And gives to that which is out of sight  
That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty,  
Which runs through all, and doth all unite—  
The hand cannot clasp the whole of his alms,  
For God goes with it and makes it store  
To the soul that was starving in darkness before.

The knight goes on, but at last, weary with his fruitless quest, he returns, to find the same leper by the wayside. This time he has a flash of insight. Here is no mere leper ; here is a son of God ; here is the image of Christ, naked and hungry. So he gets off his horse, breaks in two the crust of bread, which is all he has left, and feeds the leper ; takes some water from the brook, and gives him to drink. And lo ! his gift becomes a sacrament in which Christ is revealed, and they find Him together, and then Christ speaks :

Not what we give, but what we share—  
 For the gift without the giver is bare ;  
 Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—  
 Himself, his hungering neighbour, and Me.

It is the spirit, the outlook, the meaning of the act breaking through it that is the real gift. It is the communication of ourselves through our gift that works the real miracle and feeds the soul. The only justification of charity, as Hocking suggests, is its spiritual import, its cosmic significance, its meaning in the setting of our faith, its power to communicate a spiritual value to a man's life. This outlook alone can redeem our charities from the blight of materialism, our social service from the curse of superiority. Without this, the most practical service fails to touch the real ills of society, which are the



ills of the spirit, the wounds of broken fellowship, of a world out of touch with God.

### III

But again, this motive makes all the difference in the inspiration of our social service. It will make a difference to ourselves. We may talk fine words about brotherhood, but can we carry on the practical service which brotherhood entails without the faith in the Fatherhood of God? Will not a creedless service go to pieces in face of the difficulties and the strain? Can we go on helping people who are down without the sense of the infinite worth of the human soul which Christ awakens, and which His spirit alone can keep alive? We may help our fellows out of a pity which is next door to despair, as men drowning on a raft in mid-ocean may be kind to one another for the brief hour they have to live; but can we go on doing it, if that is our outlook about the world? Is it not a fact that, when people get into that position, pity may be supplanted by a bitter struggle for life? Can it survive in a world which, unlit by faith in man's worth as an immortal spirit, is only a sinking ship? In one of his prefaces Ruskin tries to argue that people would be even more inclined to help one another without the faith in immortality than

with it. He imagines a preacher with this hopeless outlook saying to his fellows, "Hear me, you dying men, who will soon be dead for ever. This fate which you ordain for the wretched by your selfishness, you believe to be all their inheritance. You may crush them and they will never rise to rebuke you. Their truth, which fails for lack of good, will never be recalled to whisper against you. You and they, as you think, will lie down in the dust, and the winds will cover you. Is it, therefore, easier for you, in your hearts, to inflict the sorrow for which there is no remedy? Will you take wantonly this little all of his life from your poor brother? I think better of you than this." This is all very reasonable, but it will not do. Why should such a preacher presume upon this motive of human pity in men who are going down into the dust, and who are, therefore, dust and ashes even before death takes them? If such an argument succeeded with men it could only be because it appealed to something in them better than their creed. No, the only motive which can sustain our social service is the faith that man, in spite of his failure and low estate in the world's values, has a value in the sight of God—that he is a brother, because he is a child of the Father. The real root of social contempt is practical infidelity; and a faithless outlook

on life will work out that way sooner or later. If we find kindness without religious faith, and practical service outside the churches which we do not find within them, it only means that the people who practise it are living by values which have not found their way into their creed. But, in point of fact, take it all in all, it is really from the ranks of faith that unselfishness and sacrificial service have always been recruited, and through faith, even though it be living only in some dim instinct of the blood, it is really sustained.

Still, there are—and we can thank God for it—large numbers to-day who, while not professing Christian faith, yet believe that only in Christian conduct can we find a way out of the miseries of modern civilisation. They believe in fellowship both in industrial and international life. They hold that only in a Christian attitude to one another can men get rid of war—a fact which is expressed in the League of Nations. But what lies behind all that? Can we go on believing in Christian ethics if we reject the theology on which it is based and neglect to keep the Christian faith alive, with all its meanings? Can we go on helping people, if we believe that life is only material, and has its real roots in the earth? In point of fact, the late Lord Salisbury

declared that, while he had never known what it was to doubt the truth of Christian doctrine, he had all his life found a difficulty in accepting the moral teaching of the Gospels. He added that, in fact, his acceptance of Christ's moral teaching was an act of faith due to the Divine authority upon which it rested.

Nature does not seem to care much for the individual, as Tennyson suggests. Human life is plentiful, and apparently cheap. Nine millions of men died in the war, and nature is already so making up the deficiency that we find it difficult to supply homes and food for the population. Christian service to the sick and the degraded is really a kind of challenge to nature, a defiance of the brute struggle for existence, a denial of the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Every hospital and sanatorium is a protest against those forces which seem so careless of the single life; but we may well ask, as Lord Balfour does, "whether it is possible for the ordinary man to maintain undimmed his unselfish ideals, if he thinks that nature is against them—unless, indeed, he comes to believe that God is on their side."

Surely these ideals and impulses of pity; the longing for fellowship; the dream of a warless world—all this is merely a fleck of foam on the tide, unless there is something in

the universe which is behind them. The impulse to give a cup of cold water is not of our own making. It is something which we have seen in the light of faith, even though we have not thought it out. And only an outlook which is definitely based on faith will support it for long.

The point of all this is plain. If social service is to achieve its true end, it must discover this basis of faith and plant its feet upon it. We have to come back from the valley of human service to the mountain-top of worship and illumination, there to capture again that sense of meaning which alone can give worth to our service and power to our hearts. If that service is to be saved from becoming mechanical and soulless, we have to realise what the love of God, which really inspires it, is seeking. We have to recover, continually, our vision of the Kingdom of God, in which the humblest act can find its place. Worship without service is unreal ; service without faith is ultimately futile and barren. It comes to this, does it not, that the value of what we give and what we do depends, first of all, on what we are. The heart of all Christ's giving was that He gave Himself, and it was what He was in Himself that made the gift redeeming ; so that even His simplest acts shine to-day with a light that reveals the face of God. Paul is right

when he makes the final redemption of the material universe depend upon redeemed personality. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, waiting for the unveiling of the sons of God."



## A FAITH THAT IS PREPARED TO WAIT

MATTHEW XXV.—“The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.”

THIS parable, like many others, has suffered from the habit of misplaced emphasis. Its picturesque detail is very tempting to interpreters with imagination. Like most of the other parables, the story has one point which Christ wants to get home. It is the demand that Christian living makes for a faith that is prepared to wait. In accordance with the marriage customs of the East, it was the bride's duty to wait, accompanied by her maidens, till the bridegroom came to take his place in the marriage party. These maidens carried lamps to cheer the darkness, and without her lighted lamp none of them could take her place in the marriage procession. Five of those in the story carried oil in their vessels with their lamps—a spare supply in case the bridegroom were delayed on his way. And five of them were happy-go-lucky, taking the risk that everything would be all right. And so they took their places. The long hours wore on, and they all fell asleep. At last, when the night

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was at its darkest and dreariest, the cry went up that the bridegroom was at hand. Meanwhile, the lamps of the foolish maidens had gone out. The short supply of oil was used up. In a panic they begged of the rest a share of their reserve ; but that could not be, for what Christ means by the oil is faith, which no man can get from his neighbour in a hurry ; so off they went to buy for themselves. “ And when they went to buy the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.” That is the dramatic story. What does it mean? Surely this: that if we are going to be ready for the triumphant hour and opportunity of faith we must have a faith that can hold out—a faith that is prepared to wait.

## I

Before we come to deal with this point we must get clear in our minds what Christ means by the coming of the bridegroom. That takes us on to the debatable land of modern scholarship. What Jesus means by His “second coming” is hidden in mist. And perhaps He meant it so ; for does not He come in different ways to different people? Yet there is one fact of which we can be sure. To all who hold their

faith there does come an hour—it may be more than one—when faith is vindicated ; when all the hopes it has held out are realised, and all the powers it has been nursing in the darkness find their opportunity. And this is also clear, that that hour is an hour of crisis. It has its possibilities both of triumph or of tragedy, according to the way in which we meet it.

As to the form which this hour will take, it is not possible to be dogmatic. Sometimes it has come in the form of a national situation, or a world situation, in which men have been called to decide whether they shall go up or whether they shall go down. Lowell, the American poet, says this happens once in the career of every man or nation. Then in the storm of conflicting emotions those who have faith enough to see the way of God go forward on the very wings of the storm to a new experience of God's love and a new victory of righteousness. Or such a crisis has come, as it did in Wesley's day, after a long night in which for most people religion had been submerged ; and then those who had kept their lamps alight through the hours of waiting found the dawn of a new Christian era. Or such a crisis may come, as it has for many, through the approach of death, and they have discovered then that faith held, and they were able to meet it with a strange

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peace. There is nothing surer than that Christ saw ahead for Himself and His loyal followers the final triumph of the forces of the Kingdom. For Him the Cross was never the last word. There was nothing in Him of that strange worship of defeat which is so alluring to many of our modern poets and novelists. "Faith," says Mr. Chesterton, "is the perpetually defeated thing that defies all its conquerors." But one day there is going to be no more defeat. The picture of the final end which Christ gives has no shadow upon its joy except the shadow of those who miss it. Those who believe in Him are not to be condemned for ever to wander in the mist, dreaming of the heights beyond.

I know there shall dawn a day—  
Is it here on homely earth ?  
Is it yonder, worlds away,  
Where the strange and new have birth,  
That Power comes full in play ?  
Somewhere below, above,  
Shall a day dawn—this I know.

That is the last chapter in universal history according to the New Testament. So much is clear, clear enough to cheer the saddest heart. But it is equally clear that if we are to be ready for this hour we must have the faith that is strong enough to last out and to rise to the demand which it will make on us for spiritual

quality. For all real advance, whether here or beyond, takes us into a world which will make larger calls on the resources of the spirit. We must cultivate in the twilight the eye that can see the invisible. We must keep alive in us the moral sensitiveness that will respond to the challenge. "We shall see Him as He is," says John, "wherefore he that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure." It is this quality of faith, then, which He bids us cultivate—the faith that is prepared to wait. "They that were ready went in with him to the marriage."

This comes out in the contrast between the two groups of maidens. They both had lamps with oil in them. They both set out to meet the bridegroom, and so far as we can see, with the same eagerness, the same hope. They both, that is to say, had faith. Life, as they set out, was keyed up for both to the same purpose and the same hope. But one group had no staying power. They made no preparation against the hours of darkness. They had underestimated the strain. They did not realise that faith's greatest quality is just this power to wait, this gift of holding on, this tireless loyalty, this iron patience. But the others had faced the possibilities. They realised that the bridegroom might not come so soon as their optimistic hearts suggested. So they

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prepared to see the darkness through, however long or dreary their vigil might be. They took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

## II

Now, surely what Christ would have us realise is that it is just this quality of faith the Christian way of life demands. Multitudes of people have their great moments of faith. They have flashes in which the belief in God burns into a blaze, and they realise that the Christian way of life is the only possible way through the wilderness of this world and every other way is a side-track to a morass. They see the glory of Christ for one vivid moment and they set out bravely enough. But when you meet them next their lamp is out. They may have various reasons to give. But the real reason is that it just burned out. Their faith had no staying power. They could not stick it out through the hours of gloom. They found that things did not happen exactly as they had expected; that prayer had no magical power such as they had imagined it had; that the evil in their own hearts had a deeper grip than they had thought; that the results of their efforts for a better world did not seem to make much headway against the appalling currents of selfishness and indifference.



And they gave up. They just gave up. Faith just oozed away. A traveller describes a cresset he saw in the Scilly Isles—an iron basket that once used to hold fire, kept lit and flaming to warn the passing ships off the rocks, and guide them on their way. But now it has been superseded. The fire is out. They have no further use for it, and in its place there is a pot of flowers. The hearts of some people are like that—a burned-out fire, where faith once flamed; and in the place of faith, the flowers of a sentimental but ineffective memory. Faith is just a dream that has faded. The reason may be that they just let it die because they did not realise the need for replenishing the lamp; or because in the pressure of other things they did not take the time; they had so much to do. The Sadhu Singh tells of a spot on the Himalayas where there is a bank of flowers whose scent makes the traveller torpid, so that he fails to rouse himself, and may die through the hunger and thirst of which he is not conscious. It is a parable of the spiritual life of some people. The pleasure and ease of life induce a torpor of the spirit in which it fails to feel and satisfy the need of God.

Or the reason may be that in the humdrum world in which we live they had not grit enough to hold their faith when things were dull and

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difficult. But the result is that when the big call comes, in which faith is tested and has its chance to shine, they are not fit for it. They cannot say, like Rupert Brooke, when the war came on :

Now God be thanked who has matched us with His hour  
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping.

A writer has a little parable in which he describes how a Christian in the old days of pagan Rome went back to the world and by some magic spell forgot the word which Jesus gave for God. Then came his father's death, ushering him into a world of larger responsibility ; and all through that new life he wandered miserable, unfit for its duties and its joys, because he had lost the word which was the key. This is the kind of ominous picture which Christ draws of those who have let faith slip.

The faith which Christ asks of us is the faith that can hold on through everything, through all the delays of His purpose, through all the disappointments and failures, through all that the darkness means. For the real strain of faith which we have to meet is not the big emergency ; it is the hours when there is no sign of any movement of God. It may be a time, for instance, of the discredit of religion—a time such as that before nearly every revival ; or

such as that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it looked as if hopeless spiritual paralysis had set in, from which it seemed impossible that religion could ever revive. It may be a time such as that before the war, when there was no big crisis. Life, say, is fairly comfortable, and it seems easy enough to keep up an average level of morality without the aid of faith, and religion seems as needless as a lighted lamp in the noonday. Or the darkness may take the form which it takes for some people to-day, in which they ask not whether Christianity is credible, but whether it is practicable. There are people who tell us that, however beautiful may be the Christian ideal, it cannot be made to work. We cannot harness it to the machinery of modern business, or square our methods with Christ's principles. There is no use in trying, and those who are seeking a Christian order of society are merely crying for the moon. Times like these are the real test of our faith. Can it hold out? Can it survive? Can we go on holding faith when we can see no big opportunity to put it into practice in a dramatic stand, while we wait for some open door, some bridegroom call to go forth to meet Him in a great forward move? We feel we could all rise to a big occasion, but the real test of that is whether we can be loyal in the hours when there is no

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call for anything except loyalty in little things  
to the deep convictions that will one day come  
to their own. "The wise took oil in their  
vessels with their lamps."

### III

This is not to suggest, of course, that faith is only a reserve to be kept for the big emergencies. It has its value for ordinary days, for common duties, for hours when we seem to be doing little more than marking time. It is the one thing which gives the daily round its meaning. "To see the world under a big dome of the purpose of God," says Professor Hocking, "that is happiness, and that is religion." The Christian life has been defined as "infinite love in ordinary relationships." There is a sweetness and calm which faith can give that makes a smile a sacrament. It is said of Canon Barnett, who kept his lamp lit for years in the slums of East London, that the spirit of his church was that of a man who "founded temporary helpfulness on deathless principles." Faith shows itself in a sense of confidence of which we are almost unconscious, a deep peace at the centre of the spirit. The wise virgins were calm and confident, free from care; so much so that, like the foolish ones, they could

fall asleep. But their calm was the real thing ; it was not founded on a thoughtless optimism that shuts the eyes to the possibility of trouble, but on the assurance that when the call did come they had that which would enable them to meet it. Victor Hugo has a picture of a bird perched on the slender branch of a tree that seems as if at any moment it might break in a gust of wind. And yet the bird sings—*because it knows that it has wings*. It is the power of faith in God to beget in us such a sense of confidence through everything as will enable us to be gay, and to find the good of every passing moment. The people who have real faith can see the best and enjoy the best in everything because they know that God meets them there.

They carry music in their heart  
Through dusky street and wrangling mart.  
Plying their daily toil with busier feet  
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.

But some day, says Jesus, faith will have its great task, its great challenge and opportunity. The days we are living in are days of waiting. Those who are alive to the needs of the time feel that we are on the eve of a great step forward, a revival of religion. That is what we need. The more we think with a Christian mind about the world we live in, the more we

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find ourselves caught in a mesh of conditions which is not Christian, but in which there seems very little, at the moment, that we can do. Somehow God must take the initiative. Yet we feel that the days are at hand when things will conspire to create a situation in which those who can read the signs of the times will see that He is calling us all to a decision which will bring in a fresh victory of His spirit in the earth. And the question is, when that call comes shall we have the faith, the insight, the spiritual quality to meet it? Shall we have oil in our vessels with our lamps?

#### IV

How can we make sure? There are two ways at least. We can steadily learn the mind of Christ. It is just stupid to say, as some do, that we have as much knowledge as we can use; or to pour scorn on those, who, week by week, are seeking to learn of Christ, though it seems as if they are learning more than they put into practice. Some day they will need it all, and more. In a little book called *A Gentleman in Prison*, a lady tells the story of the conversion of a Japanese criminal, waiting in prison for death. After the change came he set himself—to do what, think you?—to learn to read



and write. He had only a week or two to live. The days were numbered; the clock was ticking them out in minutes that could be counted. Why trouble himself with such pains to learn what he could never use? Because he felt that he was going out into a world where he would need every faculty he had neglected. And Browning's Grammarian, grinding at grammar while death crept on him, is a standing rebuke to those who spiritually are content to live from hand to mouth.

No end to learning :  
Earn the means first—God surely will contrive  
Use for our earning.

If the Church is to be ready for God's call she must give herself to learn of Christ, to know his mind. Nothing less than this can keep the lamp of faith burning. Only that ever closer, deeper contact with Him can keep the light in the soul by which we will recognise Him when He comes.

And the second thing that keeps faith burning is the experiences and convictions that deepen with the loyalty of every day. Ordinary Christian living does this for us; it creates a tradition, a store of experiences on which we can draw in an hour of testing. As Paul puts it, we become "rooted and built up in Him." There is such a thing as a habit of faith, a

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Christian habit of facing life. It is this habit of action in the line of our faith which keeps the lamp burning. And the light which grows in daily obedience will show us the path when we are called to choose between some great high road to a better world, and the low road of surrender to passion or fear which leads back to the jungle. The day is surely coming, for instance, when we shall have to choose in a definite situation between the way of war and the way of peace. What then? How shall we meet it? As Miss Fry says, "We shall never get a warless world through the propaganda of peace in the abstract. Nothing will hold us when a cyclone of war feeling sweeps over a country but a deep-seated habit of goodwill cultivated and formed in the hearts and lives of men."

There is an insight that grows finer as we seek to see God in ordinary situations and respond to him there—an insight that lays us open to His higher call. Some time ago I stood by the bedside of a man who had just been faced with the fact that death might not be very far away, and listened as he told me of the rich, deep peace that filled his soul and kept him from panic and bitterness. "But," he said, "I could never have taken it like this if I had not been trying to see God, and be faithful to Him through all the quiet years." Only the eyes that have

grown strong by loyalty to insight in ordinary life are keen enough to see God in the great occasions. Only the faith that meets the daily strain with patience is ready for the big emergency, and finds it the open door to triumph and discovery.









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